

THE AMISH-MENNONITES

at Kempsville, Virginia

1900-1970



COMPILED BY LEON R. ZOOK

EDITED BY LEROY MILLER

at Kempsville, Virginia

1900-1970

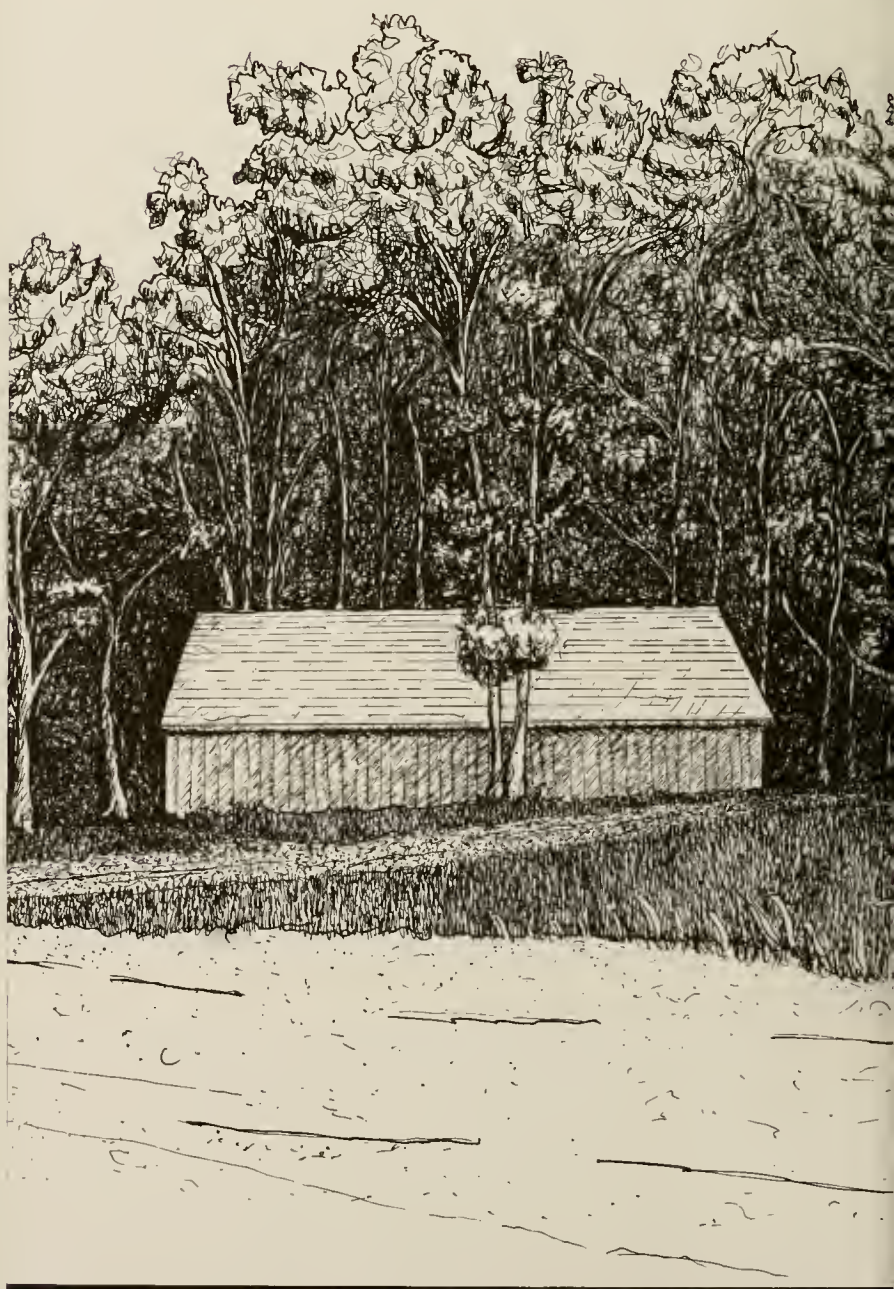
FOR MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY, the Kempsville, Virginia, Amish-Mennonite community flourished with its agricultural enterprises. Major changes came, however, as the twentieth century reached midpoint. Virginia Beach's construction boom began displacing well-kept farmsteads. First, along Witchduck, Kempsville, and Princess Anne Roads and Parliament Drive, and later along Holland Road, dairy barns and farmhouses gave way to the bulldozer's blade. Single family homes, apartments, and shopping centers sprang up where milk cows had grazed a few years earlier.

Too soon, the last vestiges of that special era have all but disappeared. We hope this volume calls up pleasant memories for those who once lived in this Amish-Mennonite community, and for readers not so privileged, may the photos and stories contained here provide a rare glimpse into what many of us still fondly recall as "living at Kempsville."

—*Leroy Miller and Leon Zook*

Front cover: William J. Overholt farmstead.
Courtesy of Henry W. Overholt

Back cover: Amanda Overholt and grandson,
Jonathan Zook. Courtesy of Mary Zook



THE
DONNING COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

The
AMISH MEETINGHOUSE
— circa 1920 —





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*A collection of stories and photos
from a time and place, gone forever,
yet living in our memories of a good and pleasant land*

REFERENCE
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COMPILED BY LEON R. ZOOK

EDITED BY LEROY MILLER



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For information, write:

The Donning Company/Publishers
184 Business Park Drive, Suite 106
Virginia Beach, VA 23462



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Tony Lillis, Director of Marketing
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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data:
The Amish-Mennonites at Kempsville, Virginia,
1900-1970 : a collection of stories and photos from
a time and place, gone forever, yet living in our
memories of a good and pleasant land /compiled by
Leon R. Zook : edited by Leroy Miller.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-89865-954-X (hc : alk. paper)

1. Amish—Virginia—Kempsville—Pictorial
works. 2. Amish—Virginia—Kempsville—Social
life and customs. 3. Mennonites—Virginia—
Kempsville—Pictorial works. 4. Mennonites—
Virginia—Kempsville—Social life and customs.
5. Kempsville (Va.)—Pictorial works. 6. Kempsville
(Va.)—Social life and customs. I. Zook, Leon R.,
1948— . II. Miller, Leroy, 1937— .

F234.K45A46 1996

975.5'51—dc20

95-44305

CIP

Printed in the United States of America

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EDITOR'S NOTE

A NUMBER OF US TOYED FOR A QUARTER-century with the idea of putting together the story of the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite community. Around 1970, the late John H. Miller, his son, Jim, and I collected a quantity of material from interviews and correspondence with several persons who had settled at Kempsville, during the early 1900s. For various reasons, mainly lack of commitment on my part, that effort ended with nothing more than a box of notes and fifteen pages of typescript. More recently, John H. Miller's son, Joe, also spent considerable time in an attempt to bring the story into print.

Leon Zook took a different route in completing the task. In the summer of 1994, he approached me with his plan to have several persons recount their families' stories about life at Kempsville. Leon asked me to write a chapter about my wife Sarah's grandparents, the Jonas C. Millers. Out of that came my greater involvement as editor and rewrite person for the project. It has been one of the most enjoyable experiences in all my years as a writer. Special thanks to each writer for graciously approving the changes made and details added in the final draft of his or her article.

I also wish to thank those persons whom I phoned on numerous occasions to confirm specific dates and other bits of information, namely: Elva Beiler, Bertha Brenneman, Alta Marie Krause, Elsie Miller, Stephen L. Miller, and Menno J. Yoder.

Lastly, and most importantly, I thank the Lord for restoring me with the physical strength and eyesight needed for accomplishing this work.

—*Leroy Miller*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DESPITE THE CONSIDERABLE TIME AND effort involved in compiling this work, I have found it, nevertheless, a most enjoyable and rewarding experience. I am also well aware that without the help of others, the task could have not been done, and I here want to acknowledge and thank those who made significant contributions.

First of all, the persons who submitted articles: Andrew J. Hershberger, Eldon and Lloyd Swartzentruber, Viola (Yoder) Swartzentruber, Abner Overholt, Joseph Overholt, Elmer S. Yoder, Mary (Miller) Yoder, Sharon Troyer, Edwin Weaver, Katie (Byler) Yoder, and Leroy Miller.

Leroy not only contributed several articles, but also used his writing and editing skills to bring overall quality to the other contributors' material. His knowledge of Amish-Mennonite culture and history, along with fifty years living here in southeastern Virginia, proved to be invaluable assets.

Special thanks to our daughters, Rosemary and Rachel, who typed and retyped the manuscript. Also, Bertha Brenneman, Elva Beiler, Mrs. John (Barbara Shrock) Beiler, and Mrs. Rufus (Mary Weaver) Yoder deserve recognition for the encouragement and information they provided.

I cannot adequately express my gratitude for those who willingly shared personal photos for the book. While too numerous to list here, many are named with the photos they provided. Wherever possible, we have credited the photographer; however, where he or she is unknown, we name the person who supplied the picture.

I would like also to express my appreciation to Joseph A. Miller for the drawings which he submitted, and for his inspiration which contributed greatly to the publication of this book.

Finally, sincere appreciation goes to my wife, Mary, and the children for their patience and understanding through the uncounted hours I spent compiling the book.

—Leon R. Zook

INTRODUCTION

IN COMPILING A BOOK THAT RECOUNTS the history of the Kempsville, Virginia, Amish-Mennonite community, one quickly becomes aware of the vast amount of available material. Each person who has been a part of the community has his or her own unique story. The constraints of time and available space, however, allow for only a fraction of what could be used.

Our attempt has been to allow a number of persons from among the larger family groups to tell about everyday events that occurred, particularly, between 1900 and 1970. These are stories of work, love, laughter, and play; they are also stories of hardship, grief, and burials in the church cemetery, all bound by a deeply held Christian faith and concern for fellow humans. Overall, we hope the collection will convey a picture of a bygone era of Amish-Mennonite life in old Princess Anne County, Virginia.

Finding pictures for this work proved a more difficult task since cameras and the possession of personal photos were forbidden by church rules until the mid-1950s. While a young boy or girl might skirt the rule and hide away a picture on rare occasions, most of the pre-1960 photos were taken by persons outside the church community.

Readers unfamiliar with the various Mennonite groups may well find *Old Order Amish*, *Amish-Mennonite*, and *Mennonite* confusing. All have their roots in the Anabaptist movement of the Protestant Reformation. Calling themselves Brethren, a small band of Reformers split with their leader, Ulrich Zwingli, in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1525.

Considered radicals, the Brethren insisted on believers' baptism, separation of church and state, freedom of conscience, and non-resistance (non-bearing of arms) along with other unpopular ideas of the time.

The *Mennonite* label comes from Menno Simons, a former Roman Catholic priest, who joined the movement in 1535. A native of Holland, Menno Simons drew together numerous small Anabaptist congregations across Holland, Germany, and Switzerland.

In the late 1600s, Jacob Amman, a Mennonite elder in Alsace believed the larger Mennonite Church was becoming worldly and uns Scriptural. Finding sympathy for his views among rural Swiss and South German Mennonite congregations, Amman and his followers withdrew to found the



Samuel Beiler house on Yoder Lane.
Courtesy of Irene Peachey

more conservative Amish branch of Mennonitism.

Today *Old Order*, and sometimes *New Order Amish*, identifies the groups who retain horse-and-buggy travel and do without electricity in their homes. On the other hand, Amish-Mennonites hold to some traditional forms of Amish dress, but allow auto ownership and many of the modern appliances that come with electricity. Most, however, do not allow radio, and television ownership is particularly forbidden. Among the more liberal Mennonites, many have chosen to accept modern society's outward trappings of everyday life.

Despite our apparent differences, together we share a common theology of the Bible as God's Word by which He reveals Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ, in the New Testament. Mingled with that is a strong sense of the transience of our earthly existence: we are "strangers and pilgrims" bound for Heaven, "the better country."

From its beginnings in 1900, the Kempsville congregation was an Old Order Amish Church. Horse and buggy were used for local travel until 1940, when a more progressive majority within the church pressed for auto

ownership. As a result, the Old Order minority moved to Stuarts Draft in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley.

Those who remained became a part of the Amish-Mennonites, though in our local area we have long been known simply as Mennonites.

We hope you will find our book readable and informative. May it help you better understand the Kempsville, Virginia Amish-Mennonites—those who once had their homes here, along with those of us who still remain.

Because of our emphasis on nonconformity in dress and not participating in public affairs we may sometimes be perceived as aloof and far removed from our neighbors. However, at this time we want to express our love and appreciation for Tidewater Virginia—its climate, natural beauty, and best of all, its people, all combined have made this "a good and pleasant land" for Amish-Mennonites these past ninety-five years.

—Leon Zook



Samuel and Sarah Beiler's children, circa 1985. Left to right: John, David, Eli, Daniel, Solomon, Samuel, Mary, and Amanda. Courtesy of Irene Peachey



The Dan Hershberger farm, later owned by Elmer M. Yoder, circa 1958. Courtesy of Alva Yoder Sr.

The Early Years in Princess Anne County

by Leroy Miller

THE FIRST AMISH FAMILIES ARRIVED IN Princess Anne County, Virginia, from Midland, Virginia, in 1900. At the time, the Fauquier County Amish community was disbanding, and three families from there moved to the Kempsville area. Daniel D. and Annie E. Hershberger and son, Simon; Ben and Lizzie Smoker and daughter, Maude; and the Christian F. Glick family settled on farms along Parliament Drive, known then as “the Turnpike.” After a relatively brief time, the Glicks moved to the emerging Mennonite community at Fentress (Chesapeake’s Mt. Pleasant area today). Dan Hershberger’s farm along the west side of Parliament was later owned by Elmer M. Yoder. The farm buildings stood near the present entrance to the Ridgelea subdivision.

Why only these three families chose

to settle at Kempsville is uncertain; however, it may have been part of the independent spirit that marked the Fauquier County Amish. According to David Luthy in his *The Amish in America*, former members of the Midland congregation set off in every direction—to Pennsylvania, Maryland, Ohio, Illinois, Mississippi, and Canada. In all likelihood, the nearby Norfolk market for farm produce and the lure of cheap land played a role in the Hershbergers’, Smokers’, and Glicks’ choice of location. David Luthy cites the following 1891 ad in the Amish-Mennonite newspaper, *The Sugarcreek [Ohio] Budget*:

*\$1.00 per acre may seem CHEAP, but investors through us have made over 500 percent. Rare opportunities in the coming metropolis. Excursions on all Railways. For information and maps, address to Hon. John Sherman:
M. W. Mason, Norfolk, Virginia.*

Apparently no Amish had taken the ad seriously, as nine years elapsed before any moved into the area. Even after the Hershbergers and Smokers arrival, two years passed before another Amish family joined them. In 1902, Crist and Elmira Swartz, with their several children, moved to Kempsville from the small Oyster Point Amish community

Elmer and Malinda Yoder, circa 1960.
Courtesy of Lloyd Swartzentruber



at Denbeigh—presently part of Newport News, Virginia. Originally from West Liberty, Ohio, the Swartzes had arrived at Denbeigh in 1900. Crist Swartz suffered from a respiratory ailment and heeding his doctor's advice, moved his family to a warmer climate.

In 1971, Crist and Elmira Swartz's daughter, Bertha, and their sons, Crist Jr., Floyd, and Grant were still living in Tidewater Virginia. That year, I interviewed Grant Swartz at his home in Norfolk's Fox Hall section. A sprightly gentleman, Grant in his mid-seventies recalled that "we lived in a little brown house on towards Greenwich from Ben Smokers." (The Kempsville Church of Christ now occupies the former site of Ben Smoker's farmstead.)

Like the Glicks before them, the Swartz family didn't make Kempsville their permanent home. Crist Swartz Sr. made his living as a timber buyer. "He was often away from home," Grant remembered. "We moved to Fairmount Park [Norfolk] in 1905, and Daddy furnished some of the lumber for the 1907 Jamestown Exposition."

As time passed, the Swartz family joined Fairmount Park Baptist Church and gradually lost contact with the Kempsville families. However, on rare occasions they would return for special meetings. Grant remembered attending an all-day service at the Kempsville Amish Church around 1920.

While the Kempsville Amish community saw no growth for years, its numbers more than doubled in 1907.

Elias Yoder, a widower, arrived with his adult sons: Milton "Milt" and his wife, Barbara, and their four sons; and Noah and his wife, Sadie; along with Pete and Sarah Kinsinger—all from Somerset County, Pennsylvania.

Living at Stuarts Draft, Virginia in 1970, the late Eli Yoder, Milt's oldest son, remembered his family's move to "Norfolk"—the name which Amish-Mennonites have long used to identify the Kempsville congregation, mainly because the mail out to Kempsville was delivered from the Norfolk post office. "Mother was always delicate ever since I can remember. The doctor advised we move to Colorado or southeast Virginia in hopes her health would improve."

The choice of locations didn't prove difficult for Milt and Barbara. Colorado seemed half a world away, far from Somerset, Pennsylvania. Virginia held far more appeal. Besides the shorter distance, the area had a milder climate than Pennsylvania. Also, Dan Hershberger's wife, Annie, was Milt and Noah Yoder's sister. "So, Grandpap [Elias] and Uncle Noah took a trip to Princess Anne County to investigate before they made up their minds to move," said Eli Yoder.

The Milt Yoders settled into an old Colonial house a half-mile northwest of Kempsville. The house stood on the west bank of the creek that runs under Princess Anne Road, several hundred feet west of Kempsville Baptist Church. Actually, a tributary to the eastern branch of the Elizabeth River, the creek was once an impressive waterway for



Noah E. Yoder, circa 1945. Courtesy of Ernest Yoder

sailing ships that docked at the Kemps Landing wharfs, pilings of which were still visible well into the twentieth century.

Eli Yoder recalled farming in Princess Anne County was different from what the Yoders had been accustomed to in Pennsylvania. “Pap always plowed deep back home, and did the same in Virginia. The locals shook their heads and said, ‘All he’s doin’ is turnin’ up old subsoil.’ They told us too, that clover wouldn’t grow there.”

Eli continued, “Another thing was, when you rented land, some owners wouldn’t allow you to use stable manure on the land. They claimed it spread weed seed. The first years, crops weren’t the best, but they got better. We grew clover tall enough a man could put the blossoms in his pants’ pocket without tearing them from the plants.”

Between 1907 and 1943, Milt and Barbara first, and later their youngest son, Simon, and wife, Katie Ann, turned the place into a handsome farmstead. They razed the old Colonial house and replaced it with a large two-

story frame with a basement. A fine dairy barn was built, and when Milt and Barbara retired from farming, they added an adjoining *Dawdy Haus* (“Grandpa house”).

Noah E. and Sadie Yoder had moved onto a farm across the creek from his brother Milton’s. Though childless, in the course of time, they built an imposing three-story house with first- and second-story enclosed screen porches full-length along the north and south sides of the structure. The Eli Swartzentruber family last owned this place before selling it in 1952 for the Kempsville Heights subdivision.

Disaster struck the Milt and Simon Yoder farm one evening in the early 1930s. In 1995, Bertha Brenneman and her sister, Elva Beiler, recalled the scene. Their family, the Lloyd W. Yoders, lived half a mile away. “We were washing dishes and through the kitchen window we saw flames coming from the barn,” Bertha said. “It was a huge fire.”

Elva, four or five at the time, recalled the glow set off by the blaze: “Mother said afterwards it was so bright



The farmhouse built by Noah and Sadie Yoder, later owned by Eli Swartzentruber. It was located at the present corner of Overland Road and Overland Court, circa 1952. Courtesy of Mildred Swartzentruber

The Noah E. Yoder farm, circa 1945. Courtesy of Joseph A. Miller



you could have read the Bible or newspaper from our yard.”

The barn was rebuilt and remained until the mid-1960s when every trace of the farm buildings disappeared in the development of the Point O’ View subdivision. By then, the William J. Overholt family had owned the property more than twenty years, having bought it when the Simon M. Yoders moved to Stuarts Draft, Virginia, in 1943.

Lack of an ordained minister has long been a prime hindrance to an Amish community’s growth. That need was met with the arrival of preacher Elias Yoder in 1907; however, several more years would pass before there was any real increase at Kempsville. In fact, the number dwindled by two in 1910, when Ben and Lizzie Smoker moved back to their native Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Smoker, a blacksmith and wagon builder, had built a large covered wagon for the journey. The late Eli M. Yoder, then twelve or thirteen, remembered the Smokers leaving Kempsville with several draft horses hitched to the big wagon, the farm dog trailing on a leash at the rear.

From that point on, growth, though sometimes slow, continued for more than forty years in the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite community. In late autumn 1910, newlyweds Noah C. and Katie Beachy arrived. The William S. Yoder family followed shortly after the turn of the year in 1911. (To avoid repetition here, further details of the



William S. Yoder story appear in chapter 5 by Viola [Yoder] Swartzentruber.)

The Daniel S. Beachy family began the trek from Meyersdale, Pennsylvania, to Kempsville on Monday, October 16, 1911. First off, they loaded the farm animals onto a railroad cattle car for the trip south. A young single fellow, Milton Bender, rode along in the car to care for the animals. Later the same day, Dan Beachy and his two oldest sons, Norman and Samuel, left Meyersdale driving a two-horse spring wagon and a single-horse buggy. Plans were made to arrive at Washington, D.C., 130 miles southeast, by Thursday afternoon. There, the men would join Mrs.

Ruth Swartzentruber, circa 1949, beside the dairy barn built by Noah Yoder. Courtesy of Mrs. Clark Yoder

Beachy and the rest of the family who had traveled from Pennsylvania by passenger train. Together, they would board the steamer for the overnight trip down the Potomac to Chesapeake Bay and on to Norfolk.

Events, however, didn't turn out as planned. Almost sixty years later, in 1970, Daniel and Amanda Beachy's third son, Joel, described the details in a letter. "On Thursday evening, we boarded the boat for Norfolk, expecting Father and the boys to arrive. They did not get there by departure time."

With the whistle's shrill farewell blast, the ship eased away from the dock, taking Amanda Beachy and the younger children, along with the worry over what might have happened with

Dan and his two sons. Their concern was soon put to rest when Dan Beachy came aboard at the ship's first stop, several miles downriver at Alexandria, Virginia. One of the horses had become sick on the way from Meyersdale, and knowing he couldn't get to Washington in time, Dan had taken a train to Alexandria.

The Beachys moved to a farm two miles north of Davis Corner—the intersection of Virginia Beach Boulevard and Newtown Road. The place was later owned by H. C. Moore, who operated a dairy farm there for many years.

Joel Beachy in his letter recalled their mailbox was more than a mile from home. After a time of putting up



Eli Swartzentruber on "moving day"
1952. Courtesy of Mrs. Clark Yoder

with the inconvenience, Daniel Beachy began circulating a petition around the neighborhood to have mail delivery nearer individual homes. One gentleman, misunderstanding the petition's intent, wanted no part of adding his signature. "No suh, cap'n, I can't do that," he said. "Seein,' I already belong to two lodges."

The Beachys were among the first farmers in the area to own a grain binder. Joel went with his father to pick up the new implement when it arrived at the Greenwich station. The disassembled parts were loaded onto the farm wagon and the pair set out for home. Stopping at the Davis Corner general store, Joel stayed with the wagon while Dan went inside to make a purchase. A bystander eyed the metal parts on the wagon bed. Automobiles were a rarity in 1912, and the curious fellow concluded he might be gazing at one of those modern wonders. "Say, boy," he addressed Joel. "Would that be one of them new gas machines you got there?"

With the arrival of the Beachys, the Kempsville Amish congregation had grown to seven households. The group also now had a second minister, with Dan having been ordained earlier in Pennsylvania. During 1912, the Noah Lees, Daniel D. Yoders, and Jonathan "Yonie" Beilers were among the families who arrived in Princess Anne County.

Numerous other Amish families moved to Kempsville over the next few years. Some learned quickly they hadn't found their Promised Land and left

after only a year or two. The farmland usually was less fertile than older, established communities. Poor drainage on the low flatlands sometimes resulted in late planting and poor crop yields.

A more debilitating problem, malaria, discouraged some Amish settlers. Dan Beachy's daughter, the late Elizabeth (Mrs. Jonas E.) Miller described to me in 1971, the effects of malaria. "One day you might feel rather well, then be unable to get out of bed the next. We took quinine until our ears rang, literally. You knew then it was time to stop.

"The John Swarey family moved into the area around 1913. John stayed sick and in bed most of the time they lived there. The Swareys stayed less than a year," Elizabeth remembered.

Despite the fact some settlers chose not to remain, the Kempsville Amish community grew steadily and by 1916, the congregation numbered fourteen households.

More details about the Kempsville Amish community's further development can be found in chapter 5 by Viola (Yoder) Swartzentruber and in chapter 9 by Andrew J. Hershberger.



The Milt Yoder farm, later owned by William J. Overholt, circa 1960.
Courtesy of Henry Overholt



The location of the Milt Yoder/William Overholt farm photographed from Overland Court in 1995.
Courtesy of Leon R. Zook

The Church At Kempsville

by Leroy Miller

AS IN ALL AMISH AND MENNONITE communities, church life has been a vital force throughout the existence of the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite congregation. Even in the beginning, with only two or three families, religious life was not neglected. Scheduled preaching services were held one Sunday per month when a minister came from the Providence Amish Church in Warwick County—now Newport News. Travel to Kempsville from the north side of the James River involved an all-day trip by boat and train. Today, with I-64 and the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel, the distance can be covered in an hour or less.

According to Emery Glick in *Fifty Years Building on the Warwick*, D. Z. Yoder served the group at Kempsville until 1904, when he moved back to his native Ohio. That left the Warwick County Amish and the Kempsville families dependent on visiting ministers for the two years. Joe Zook came from Mifflin County, Pennsylvania, a number of times before moving to Warwick County in 1906.

Both Grant Swartz and the late Elmer Yoder—Milt Yoder's second son—remembered Joe Zook as a man with a lively sense of humor. Swartz recalled a Saturday when Zook arrived a bit before the evening meal. "When we sat dawn, old Joe said, *Ich hab g'meend ich hab oiyer dutsch g'schmackt*" ("I

thought I smelled eggs dutch [omelette].")

Elmer M. Yoder said, "Zook would often ask whether anyone had killed a chicken for him, or if we had any settin' hens around."

As noted previously, with the arrival of the Yoders and Kinsingers in 1907, the Kempsville Amish had their first resident minister, Elias Yoder having been ordained in Pennsylvania. During the first year, the newcomers joined with the Hershbergers and Smokers for Sunday services. However, as often occurs in small Amish colonies, differences soon became apparent between the several families. For one thing, the Dan Hershberger family and the Ben Smoker family had become members of the Warwick County Providence congregation, soon after moving to Kempsville. Church rules for the Providence group were more liberal than the Pennsylvania families cared to accept.

By 1908, after the Milt Yoders bought the farm across from Dan Hershbergers' farm, the group divided into two tiny congregations. The old Colonial house had a large room in which the Yoders and Kinsingers began holding church services. For more than five years, the room would serve as a meeting place for the growing Kempsville Amish Church.

There is no record when the minister from Warwick County stopped



Quilting in front of the church house,
circa 1960. Courtesy of Leora
(Overholt) Swartzentruber

coming for services with the Smokers and Hershbergers; however, it's doubtful the practice continued beyond 1910, when Ben and Lizzie Smoker moved to Pennsylvania. Daniel Hershberger died in 1911, which left only his widow, Annie, and son, Simon, as members at Providence. The two transferred their membership to the Kempsville Church in 1913.

That year marked several notable events for the Amish community. With the arrival of the Christian J. Swartzentruber family from Texas, the congregation now had four ordained ministers. However, that number was reduced by one when Daniel Beachy, forty-seven, died September 8, 1913, leaving Elias Yoder, Daniel D. Yoder, and Swartzentruber as church leaders.

Three or four ministers for a relatively small church may, no doubt, seem unusual for those accustomed to a one-pastor congregation. Historically,

the plural ministry has been a hallmark of Amish and Conservative Mennonite Churches. Ministers are chosen from the laity by lot and serve without salary. Once ordained, a minister continues making his livelihood as a farmer, carpenter, or other craftsman. Two or three ministers and a bishop usually share turns preaching. Since there is no hierarchy, the bishop's role is basically that of a senior pastor who officiates at baptisms, weddings, and other special services.

With the arrival of more Amish families, the meeting room at the Milt Yoder home was becoming crowded by 1913. The congregation began planning for a larger facility. Church discipline at Kempsville was stated to be the same as held by the Somerset County, Pennsylvania Amish congregations. During the late 1800s, the Somerset Amish began to build meeting houses for worship—unlike

most Old Order Amish who hold Sunday services in members' homes. The decision was made to build a church house at Kempsville.

The Milton Yoder family set aside a plot for the new building—presently Our Lady Of Perpetual Help Byzantine Catholic Church, 216 South Parliament Drive, Virginia Beach. The site lay at the northwest corner of the Yoder property. Construction began in late 1913. At this late date, the exact dimensions are not available; however, in the context of two later additions, the original building was approximately thirty by forty feet. The late Eli M. Yoder could not recall from which Amish family's woods the lumber was cut, but did remember the flooring and grooved wall and ceiling boards came from Kramer Brothers Lumber Company, in Elizabeth City, North Carolina. (More details on this are found in Eldon Swartzentruber's account of the Christian J. Swartzentruber family in chapter 6).

The rectangular, A-roofed frame structure followed the simple lines of Somerset, Pennsylvania, Amish meeting houses. A single front entrance door, set in the center of the west wall, faced the road. Double-hung windows along the north and south walls could be raised and lowered for ventilation. Two free-standing coal stoves provided heat.

As the congregation grew over the next dozen or so years, lack of space again became a problem. In 1927, the building was lengthened to fifty-two feet inside the auditorium and a lean-to

anteroom attached to the front toward the road. The addition sufficed for the next two decades. However, that time length resulted partially from a split among the members into two separate congregations in 1940. (For more details about division see chapter 5 by Viola Swartzentruber, chapter 6 by Lloyd Swartzentruber, and chapter 11 by Elmer S. Yoder.)



Interior of the old Kempsville Mennonite Church, circa 1984. Courtesy of Irene Peachey

The last major construction occurred in 1948, when the building was widened. This was accomplished by cutting the structure lengthwise down the center, and moving the south wall out approximately twenty feet. Building in the space from either side kept the roofline from becoming lopsided. The work was all done by the men and boys in one week, with no interruption in Sunday services. At this same time, the horse barn north of the church was torn down. Except for the installation of restrooms, carpet in the auditorium, and general maintenance, there were no improvements of consequence after 1948, until the property—still owned by Milton Yoder's descendants—was sold in 1986.



Kempsville Amish Church on present Parliament Drive with horse barn at left, circa 1920. Courtesy of Joseph A. Miller



Old Kempsville Mennonite Church building in 1995. Courtesy of Leon R. Zook



The Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church and School is now located at 3261 North Landing Road in Virginia Beach. Courtesy of Leon R. Zook

By then, having sold the Kempsville Mennonite School property on Overland Drive, the congregation moved to its present location at 3261 North Landing Road, Virginia Beach. Built largely by the members and volunteers from other Amish-Mennonite communities, the attractive brick structure

serves as both house of worship and Christian Day school. Today, 1995, Donnie Brenneman and Raymond Kauffman serve respectively as the congregation's bishop and minister. Sunday morning church attendance averages 110.

Growing Up

by Leroy Miller

WATER BAPTISM MARKS AN IMPORTANT point in the life of any Amish or Mennonite person. The ceremony has both spiritual and practical significance. In receiving baptism, the applicant bears witness of his/her commitment to follow Jesus Christ; the rite also installs one as a member of the visible church. For the Amish-Mennonite young person, baptism, usually around age sixteen, also allows one to join the youth group or “youngfolks”—the term still used by most Amish-Mennonites to identify their single young people.

While the average American teen, even in the 1950s, might have found our youth social life dull and boring—no parties, beer, dancing, or movies—“Going with the youngfolks” was an

important part of growing up. In the context of our sheltered environment with its strong emphasis against worldliness, most of us were content with the recreational and service activities offered within the group.

The Kempsville youngfolks reached their greatest number in 1953, shortly before the first migration to Montezuma, Georgia. Late that spring approximately seventy of us held a picnic at today’s Munden Point Park in Virginia Beach. Water skiing was just beginning to be a popular sport. As I recall, Henry W. Overholt had brought along his father Will’s small boat. The fact that Overholt’s eighteen-horse-power outboard was inadequate for the task, didn’t discourage a number of us.

The major difficulty was getting out of the water, as the boat was in a virtual stall at that point. Elvin Miller and I managed after several attempts to maintain our balance long enough for the boat to pick up speed. Several other fellows weren’t as lucky. In my mind’s eye I see Eli Weaver, who now lives at Orrville, Alabama, trying desperately to stand erect, only to plunge face forward into the water.

Activities usually involved tradition, circumstance, or perceived need, without direct planning by a church-appointed youth leader. For instance, the Sunday evening singing has long been the centerpiece of social life for

Sunday afternoon get-together? Front row, left to right: Edith Troyer, Leona Overholt, Marie Yoder, Elsie Miller, and Alta Miller. Back row: Anna Mae Overholt, Mable Yoder, Louella Miller, Leora Overholt, and Mary Troyer. Courtesy of Leroy Miller



Amish young people. Held in a church family's home, a singing at Kempsville was far more than an hour-long period of German and English hymn singing and informal conversation afterward. Here a quick glance or winsome smile could be a shy fellow's first hint a particular young lady might be interested. Those overtures could lead to a date—escorting the girl home after the singing. First dates were often arranged by a close friend of the boy or girl, with the go-between relishing the role of matchmaker.

Now and then, a youth event was simply for fun and recreation. However, for those occasions, permission from parents came easier if Amish-Mennonite young people were visiting from outside the community. With our penchant for hospitality, the older folks may have felt some satisfaction that the trait also lived in their children. Visitors often merited plans for an outing at the beach, a baseball game, or bay fishing trip from Harrison's at Ocean View.

Throughout the early years the youth group's cornhuskings and other



evening work bees were held primarily for the benefit of Kempsville church members. That focus changed around 1950, with summer garden projects. The youth group raised green peas and lima beans, planting, weeding, picking, and hulling the crops by hand. The vegetables were then sold and the proceeds used for Christmas grocery and fruit baskets for needy persons around Princess Anne County.

About the same time, the group began distributing devotional papers—*The Way*, and later, *The Evangelist*—one Sunday afternoon each month in

Youth Group, 1959. Front row, left to right: Mary Mast, Mary Ellen Mast, Lucinda Yoder, Katie Troyer, Ruth Swartzentruber, Edna Hershberger, Martha Mast, Edna Yoder, Sarah Mae Overholt, Pauline Hershberger, Viola mast, and Sara Zook. Second row: Alta Marie Miller, Laura Yoder, Leora Yoder, Martha Hershberger, Ida Brennehan, Leona W. Overholt, Leora Overholt, Clara Miller, Anna Miller, Elmina Yoder, and Janet Miller. Third row: Betty Miller, Leona F. Overholt, Louella Miller, Betty Overholt, Malinda Hershberger, Marie Yoder, Elma Hershberger, Ray Swartzentruber, and Pete Gingerich. Fourth row: Owen Yoder, Samuel Kramer, Melvin Yoder, Clifford Yoder, Paul Hershberger, Elmer Yoder, Eli Yoder, John Henry Yoder Jr., and Jerome Mast. Fifth row: Robert Overholt, Mervin Overholt, Jim Miller, Victor Overholt, Amos Miller, John Troyer, and Merlin Hershberger. Courtesy of Francis Miller Jr.



Visitors at the Beach, circa 1946. Courtesy of C. H. "Curly" Byler

the Liberty Park and Roberts Park sections of Norfolk. There was also singing at institutions and private homes for aged and ill residents. We sang at least once or twice each month at the Lake Taylor Hospital, Norfolk, and the small Virginia Beach hospital at the oceanfront. Travel to and from those places reflects on economic and sociological patterns that prevailed in the Kempsville community during the 1950s.

Nearly all single young people lived and worked for their parents on the home farm. Those under age twenty-one seldom received regular wages, however, parents paid for most of their children's needs, including one vehicle for those old enough to drive. While a majority of teen-age girls had driver's licenses, they rarely drove alone at night. Consequently, girls without brothers in the youth group depended on male cousins or neighbors for transportation.

After I began going steady with Sarah in 1955, we usually picked up the Troyer sisters, Edith and Mary, and Sarah's cousins, Alta Marie and Louella Miller, all of whom lived along Holland Swamp Road. Sometimes we drove directly to our destination, but on other occasions we would meet at the schoolhouse on Overland Drive and car pool from there. The Troyer sisters later moved from the area, but a special bond had developed from our time together. Sarah and I were particularly saddened at Edith's, Mary's, and Louella's deaths in the years since then.

If baptism and age sixteen allowed access to the Kempsville youngfolks, then marriage effectively ended one's participation in youth group activities. No formal announcement was needed, everyone just knew a wedding marked the transition from "youngfolks" to "young-marrieds."

A wedding at Kempsville was a highlight among social events and followed Amish tradition. Beginning early forenoon prospective bride and groom with their witnesses—two single couples, family, and invited guests would gather at the church for the wedding sermon and ceremony. Once the two-hour-long service ended, everyone would go to the bride's home for the noon meal.

No shuffling buffet line with ham biscuits, mixed nuts, and punch bowl here; this was a full-blown sit-down feast. Temporary tables set up in every available space were laden with bounties from the farm garden and poultry house. Mashed potatoes, chicken and dressing, homemade egg noodles, pickled beets, creamed corn, graham cracker pudding, pies, cakes, fruit dessert, and more—all the mouth-watering dishes tourists seek at Amish-style restaurants today—we took them for granted.

While the noon dinner belonged to the older guests with children, the evening meal was for the youngfolks when every fellow present was expected to have a female dining partner. For the young man who had until now resisted any public interest in the opposite



The courtship of Leroy and Sarah (Miller) Miller, 1955. Courtesy of Anna Miller



The 1958 wedding of Elvin and Annie (Hershberger) Miller. Courtesy of Joseph Hershberger

sex, “taking a girl to the table” bordered on something akin to terrified anticipation.

The wedding supper was usually around 8:00 p.m. Until then, the young people congregated upstairs, boys in one room and girls in another. As time for the seating approached, two or three younger married men stationed themselves at the head of the stairs to make certain no one slipped by without a partner. Fellows with steady girlfriends went first, followed by those who had asked a girl beforehand. Last came the timid who had failed to choose a partner. The watchmen on the stairs were now in their element, pairing off couples as they would—a short chubby fellow with a girl six inches taller or a sixteen-year-old with someone five or six years older. To the

matchmakers’ good-natured laughter, the couple would stumble to find seats, certain that all eyes were on them.

Because time tends to dull pain and disappointment, as well as sharpen the pleasure of everyday events from a bygone era, I wondered about my objectivity in recalling teenage life at Kempsville during the 1950s. However, in reviewing the comments by other contributors to this work, a common theme recurs—life in this Amish-Mennonite community had its own special qualities. Admittedly there was evidence enough of human weakness and imperfection, but the members’ genuine concern for one another, high moral standards, and commitment to follow Christ forged an unforgettable bond for many of us.



The wedding of Walter and Betty (Hershberger) Mast. Courtesy of Harold Overholt



Wedding party, 1960. Left to right: Harold Overholt, Edna Hershberger, Lewis Overholt (groom), Mary Ellen (Mast) Overholt (bride), Victor Overholt, and Viola Mast. Courtesy of Harold Overholt

Servers for 1960 wedding reception. Left to right: Mervin Overholt, Leora Yoder, Ruby Yoder, Simon Overholt, Leona Overholt, Eli Yoder, Pauline Christiner, Jerome Mast, Naomi Overholt, and William Overholt. Courtesy of Harold Overholt





Wedding Servers, 1959. Left to right: Elma Hershberger, Ray Swartzentruber, Sarah Hershberger, Jim Miller, Marie Yoder, Daniel Miller, Elsie Miller, Eli Yoder, Laura Yutzy, Martin Miller, Sara Zook, and Paul Hershberger. Courtesy of Harold Overholt



Wedding Party, 1957. Left to right: Ray Swartzentruber, Elma Hershberger, Norman Swartzentruber (groom), Mary Hershberger (bride), Paul Hershberger, and Bertha Swartzentruber. Courtesy of Joseph Hershberger



The 1952 wedding of Lloyd and Viola (Yoder) Swartzentruber. Courtesy of Lloyd Swartzentruber

Sunday School Recollections

by Leroy Miller

JOAS “J. B.” AND IDA MILLER AND WE four oldest: Leroy, Lester, Mary, and Barbara arrived in the Kempsville community from Wayne County, Ohio, in November 1945. I was eight at the time. Although Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church had similarities to the Old Order Amish Church in Ohio, there were also distinct differences. Rather than going to house church in individual homes, we now attended services at the same place every Sunday. Kempsville also had pews—then known as “church benches.” Admittedly, the wooden seat and slightly angled back could not compare with the padded pews found in many Amish-Mennonite Churches today. They were, nevertheless, more comfort-

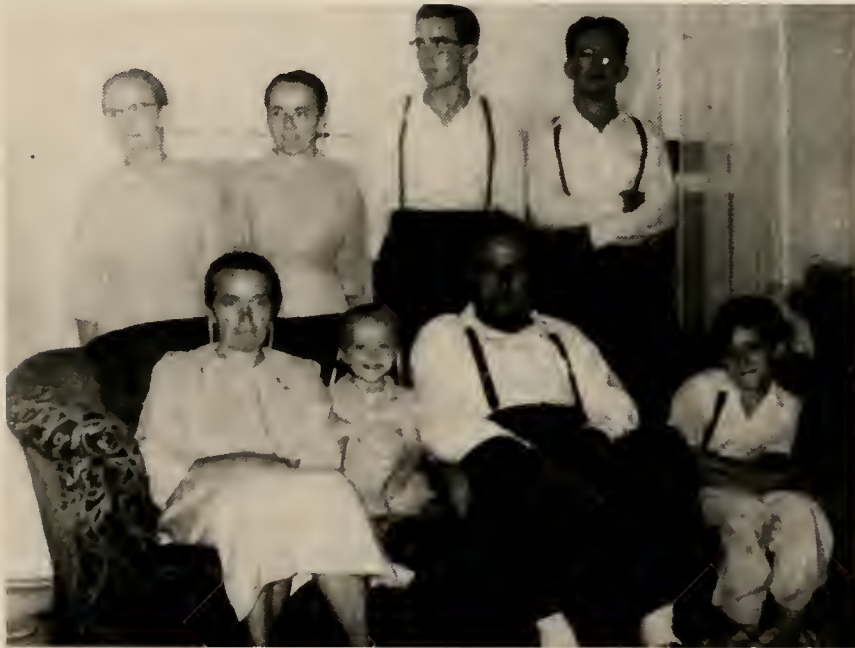
able than the narrow backless benches to which we’d been accustomed.

As in our former church in Ohio, German preaching services were held every other Sunday, but here at Kempsville there was Sunday school on the Sunday between. Sunday school wasn’t a completely new experience as we had attended while living temporarily in Florida. Here, though, classes were all in German (the congregation switched to an all-English service around 1961).

Speaking in familiar Pennsylvania German dialect, my first teacher, Amanda Swartzentruber, a single lady, taught our class of five boys the German alphabet and spelling with the aid of a small primer. The task, certainly no small feat, meant learning to distinguish Gothic script letters, markedly unlike the English. Lower-case “f” and “s,” along with “h” and “k” were particularly troublesome, sometimes leading a confused student to coin a word that brought snickers from his classmates.

In spite of difficulty, most of us learned the rudiments of High German. I remember the sense of accomplishment after a year or two, when I was able to read from Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible. In the years since, I have maintained and further developed my interest in German.

The Joas B. Miller family, 1954.
Standing left to right: Barbara,
Mary, Lester, and Leroy (the editor).
Seated: Ida, Betty, Joas Sr., and
Joas Jr. Courtesy of Leroy Miller



While by no means expert in the language, I do read and speak German with some proficiency, thanks, in part, to Amanda Swartzentruber.

Children's Sunday school at Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church was more than learning the German language. After a class period, teachers and children would assemble on the open back porch or in an anteroom for singing, a Bible lesson, and "the question." The latter was assigned as homework for us to answer the next Sunday school session. Answers to "the question" were always found in the Bible, and were then enlarged upon by

at least one or more of the teachers. The widow, Sara Beiler—whom even we children recognized for her devotion to the Lord—was especially adept in pointing us to Biblical truth.

Even today, my brother, Lester, loves to recall Sara's comments one late autumn Sunday after "the question" was announced for next Sunday school. We had been told to find the best and greatest Christmas gift ever given. Blinking wisely, Sara admonished us, "Yes, children, remember, it was something far more than a (fancy) handkerchief or a box of crayons."



Amanda (Swartzentruber) Yoder was Leroy's Sunday school teacher. Late in life she married widower Simon Yoder and is seen here circa 1983. Courtesy of Elmer S. Yoder



Mrs. Sara Beiler, 1957. Courtesy of Irene Peachey

William S. and Amanda (Beachy) Yoder Family

by Viola (Yoder) Swartzentruber

GRANDFATHER WILLIAM S. YODER, THE oldest of three children, was born 1867, in western Maryland's Garret County, near the village of Grantsville.

Grandpa's mother, Barbara, died when he was three. A year later, great-grandfather Solomon married the widow Catharine Maust. Together, they had three children, before she also died. Solomon married a third time to Elizabeth Hershberger. As a result, William grew up with one full sister and brother, three half-sisters, and three mothers.

On September 17, 1893, William married Amanda Beachy. By 1910, seventeen years later, they had a family

of five sons and three daughters—Lloyd, Noah, Sadie, Annie, Enos, Rudy, Katie, Tillie, and one-year-old baby Sol. Wilmer and Christian were born later. Finding farmland for their growing sons would pose a problem in the settled Amish communities of Garret County, Maryland, and neighboring Somerset County, Pennsylvania, just to the north.

William and Amanda's thoughts turned increasingly to Princess Anne County, Virginia, with its promise of cheap, available farmland. Besides, Amanda's sister Barbara's family was already living there. The Milton E. Yoders had moved to the Kempsville

Lloyd Yoder is on the left with the black hat in this 1962 family gathering. Courtesy of Lloyd Swartzentruber



area in 1907. Sometime in 1910 Grandpa Wills made the decision to leave their native home. Soon after the New Year, 1911, they set out for Virginia's coastal flatlands.

The older children found it especially difficult to leave the beautiful wooded hills surrounding the home place, with its maple grove and sugar camp, where maple syrup was boiled during the late-winter sap run. In a youthful act, Lloyd (my dad), seventeen, and Noah, fifteen, left lasting testimony of the bond with their Maryland home. A few days before moving, the two wrote their names on the granary wall with a heavy lead pencil. When our family visited the farm in 1975, the names were still legible on the bare wooden boards.

The farm animals and household furnishings were loaded onto boxcars and shipped overland by rail to Virginia. The family then boarded a passenger train to Washington, D.C., and from there rode the overnight steamer to Norfolk. Arriving in the Kempsville community, they settled on a farm off Witchduck Road. The third of Grandpa William's sons, Enos, and his family lived there later, until the place was sold in 1953 for the Aragona Village housing development. Entrance to the half-mile-long lane was just beyond the present Witchduck Road–Aragona Boulevard intersection. The farm buildings stood near the present site of Aragona Elementary School.

In 1920, Grandpa, age fifty-three, was ordained by lot to the Christian

ministry at the Kempsville Church. Five years later, he was ordained bishop of the congregation. Dawdy, as we called him, was by nature a quiet, reserved person and felt the weight of this new responsibility, made all the more difficult for his inability to read the German Bible. Amish church services were conducted—as most are yet today—all in German. Preaching was mostly in the Pennsylvania Dutch (German) dialect, unlike the Scriptural text of Martin Luther's German translation.

To make up for Dawdy William's lack, Mommy Amanda and daughter Annie, literate in High German, set about teaching him to read the language. Husband and wife, already well into middle-age, spent hours on end in this slow and difficult process.

The Kempsville Church had begun having a Sunday school around 1920; however, not all members were in total agreement with this innovation—Grandpa William being one. Though he reluctantly consented for others to conduct the service, Grandpa would not participate in a class. As a small girl, I remember him sitting alone on the ministers' bench, open Bible in hand, reading silently while the rest of the congregation grouped in classes for the Sunday school hour. While my Grandpa opposed Sunday school, his fellow minister, C. J. Swartzentruber, was a staunch promoter. The Yoder-Swartzentruber rift could not have been too deep or permanent. Today, one of C. J.'s grandsons, Lloyd, is my husband.

Grandpa's farm off Witchduck Road was only four miles from our place—not far by automobile, but a half-hour drive with horse and buggy. We children always delighted in hearing Old Nell clip-clopping down the road and turning in at our lane. Dawdy and Mommy had come to visit!

Grandmother's hair had turned prematurely gray at age thirty, and gone all white by the time I remembered her. She was a woman of medium height and build, who cared deeply about her grandchildren. Like most grandmothers, she gave us candy treats, but certainly one of her best gifts to me was a small Bible storybook, which I still have in my possession. In her German prayer book, her thumb print had all but worn through the page at *Ein Gebet für treue Eltern für ihre Kinder* (a prayer for use by faithful parents for their children). After she moved to Stuarts Draft, she and I kept in touch by letter until shortly before her death in 1953.

Grandpa's health had begun to fail by the mid-1930s. He felt a younger man should be called to take on the church leadership at Kempsville. In 1936, his son-in-law, Simon Schrock, was ordained bishop.

Amish history is marked by episodes of unrest and church splits; the Kempsville congregation was no exception. In 1937, a number of members came under the influence of Pentecostalism—a radical departure from our staid, traditional worship style. Several families left to join the Assemblies of God. Much to Grandma

and Grandpa's dismay, their second youngest, Wilmer, and his wife, Carrie, were among those leaving. Wilmers later moved to Missouri, where he pastored a church, until his death in an auto accident in 1952.

Though Pentecostalism caused a stir, horse and buggy versus automobile ownership became the wedge that divided families and split the Kempsville Church into two distinct congregations. With the late 1930s had come a growing sense among the majority that horse-and-buggy travel was no longer safe around the community and to and from Norfolk. Others—Grandpas among them—felt there could be no compromise with principles that separated them from the rest of society.

At this point, to avoid repetition, I will leave the broader aspects of the split to Elmer S. Yoder who has written about the matter in chapter 11 of this book. I will, however, briefly describe how the division affected the William S. Yoder family. The switch from horse and buggy to automobile did not occur all at once.

Rather, over a period of several years various members of an extended family would, one by one, buy a car or truck and join the new "Beachy" Church (Beachy here has nothing to do with Virginia Beach, but rather refers to Mose Beachy, the founder of this particular group of Amish-Mennonites).

In the end, only two of William and Amanda Yoder's children, Annie (Mrs. Ed Mast) and Sadie (Mrs. Simon Schrock), remained with the church of



Aerial view, circa 1950, looking toward Kempsville from approximately one and a half miles northwest above present Parliament Drive, Church house is in left center of picture. The Lloyd Yoder farm is on the left. Courtesy of C. H. "Curly" Byler

their parents. However, by then Grandpa had died of cancer in 1941, and was buried in the church cemetery at Kempsville. The following year, Grandma moved with Simon Schrock's to the emerging Old Order community in Shenandoah Valley at Stuarts Draft, Virginia. Grandma Amanda lived there until her death in February 1953.

After a couple years in Virginia, it became evident William's son, Lloyd, missed more than just the scenic outdoor beauty of Garret County, Maryland. A lovely young lady, brown-eyed Amelia Tice, was reason enough for an annual trip to his former home community for the fall apple harvest. The couple was married there March 20, 1917; however, Lloyd (Dad) and Amelia (Mother) moved back to Virginia and set up housekeeping in an empty chicken house on Grandpa William's farm. Times were different then, no doubt. The newlyweds used orange crates for their first kitchen table and cabinets. A small wood-burner, its



grate held in place with a brick, served as heating and cookstove.

They lived there a relatively short time, before buying land at Beech Grove, a mile from Kempsville. With much of the land wooded, clearing had to be done mostly with crosscut saw and grubbing hoe—chainsaws and bulldozers were still years in the future. The road frontage began at Yoder Lane and stretched east several hundred yards along Parliament Drive. To the north, Norfolk Southern tracks cut across our

Lloyd Yoder farmhouse, 1959. Courtesy of Mrs. Roman Chupp

back fields. The house, barn, and outbuildings were set just east of the Point O' View Elementary School. For thirty-odd years this was our "home-place." We six children—Melvin, Rufus, Bertha, Menno, Elva, and I, Viola, were born there.

With all the hard work and responsibilities that go with raising a family and operating a farm, Dad also struggled with the ravages of rheumatoid arthritis most of his adult life. From the age of nineteen, he suffered periodic bouts of the crippling illness. The intense pain sometimes left him helpless in bed, unable to turn over or feed himself.

During one of these severe attacks in 1942, the Princess Anne County clerk, William Hudgins, paid Dad a visit. Mr. Hudgins said his father's arthritis had greatly improved following a series of treatments at Hot Springs, Arkansas. Travel by car was difficult in 1942, with World War II rationing in effect and a 35-miles-per-hour speed limit on the open highway. Mr. Hudgins, however, proved the sincerity of his concern by announcing, "Lloyd, I'm giving you a special permit and tokens for tires and gas. I want you to go."

Ira and Susie Zook, friends of Mom and Dad from the Deep Creek Mennonite community, agreed to go along to help drive. Gas stations then were few and far between across the Southern states, and restrooms all but nonexistent. On one occasion, Ira's desperation grew as he scanned the passing landscape in vain. Suddenly he shouted, "Stop, Lloyd!"

The moment the car stopped, he was off down the path to a small house. "Ira," his wife called, "The sign says PRIVATE."

Without missing a step, Ira retorted over his shoulder, "And that's exactly what I want."

The mineral water treatments at Hot Springs proved very beneficial in relieving Dad's arthritis symptoms. Trips there became a yearly event until he contracted pneumonia in 1974.

Chronic illness often takes an emotional toll on the sick one's spouse and children. However, Simon Beachy, who worked for us during the 1930s Depression, later recalled he never saw Mother cross or upset in the three years he stayed with us.

As long as I can remember, my parents made weekly trips to sell produce at the Norfolk Market. They would rise each Saturday at 3:00 or 4:00 a.m., in preparation for the long day. During the early years, they set up shop along the sidewalk on Brewer Street. Attending the market during the winter was a sometimes brutal experience, with nothing but a tarpaulin and kerosene heater to ward off the elements. Later, Dads moved into a more pleasant environment in the Norfolk City Market. A number of others of the Kempsville Amish-Mennonites also had stalls there.

The building, a huge cavernous structure, was bounded by Monticello Avenue, Market and Brewer Streets and covered half a city block. Mother and Dad sold pork and poultry products there until around 1954.

We kept a large flock of laying hens and sold four to five hundred dozen eggs each week. When the hens ceased laying, they were butchered and sold as baking hens. Since little was wasted in those days, my brothers saved the heads, feet, soft eggs and egg bags, arranged on a tray and sold them for a quarter—money they were allowed to keep. We also dressed fryers, plucking the feathers by hand until around 1940, when Dad bought a mechanical picker.

During the winter months pork products were a major part of our market items. One hog, butchered weekly was processed into fresh sausage, liver pudding, head cheese, and scrapple. There's an old Southern saying that went with hog butchering, "They sell everything but the squeal." Indeed, we did, even cleaning and cooking the intestines for chitterlings.

On one occasion, while still using a horse team and wagon to haul our produce, Dad was ill and unable to go. Mother bravely set out with one of the older children; however, not altogether sure of the way, she dropped the reins, allowing the big Percherons their heads. Perch and Pearl didn't hesitate, they had been this route often before and delivered Mother and the cargo to downtown Norfolk without incident.

Several years later, Dad hired Dick Krahenbill and his wife Jennie with their car to tow the market wagon to and from the city. About the same time, our neighbors, the John B. and Sara Yoders, had also hired a car and driver. Returning from market one Saturday

evening, Johns were confronted in their lane by an armed man. Sara attempted to hide the money in her dress front, but thought better of it when the robber put the gun in her face. When the robber turned and demanded John's money, he tried to wrest the gun away. The gun discharged, slightly wounding John in the hand.

John Yoder's son, Menno, who today lives in Chesapeake, recalled the incident recently in a conversation with Leroy Miller. "I don't remember how much money the fellow got, but it couldn't have been very much, as the folks usually made a bank deposit in the afternoon."

Born in 1930, I have many memories, pleasant and otherwise, of our years at Kempsville. I particularly enjoyed wheat harvest before grain combines came into use. Dad and Uncle Noah shared ownership of a threshing machine. When the wheat fields turned golden, we knew it was time to hitch Perch and Pearl into the grain binder.

Measured against today's computerized farm equipment, the binder was a primitive machine. However, the reel, sickle bar, chains, sprockets, and canvas webbing all meshed to cut the grain, tie it into sheaves, and drop them onto a holding platform. After watching the sheaves pile up, it gave one a sense of importance to trip the foot latch and dump the heap on the ground. Now, all hands got busy with shocking. A shock consisted of eight to ten sheaves set, heads up, in a tight clump with a final



Chicken house on the Lloyd Yoder farm, 1957. Courtesy of Irene Peachey

sheaf fanned and flattened for a top cap to keep the center dry. The work was hard and often hot and sweaty, but the sight of rows of shocks resembling little thatch huts brought a feeling of accomplishment at the end of the day.

The shocks were allowed to dry several weeks, until a morning when Dad would drive in our lane with the old Hart Parr tractor, pulling the big threshing machine behind. The men would spend the larger part of a day, greasing the machine and setting up the long chute to blow the straw into the barn loft. Threshing day meant my sisters and I got to drive the team while the farm wagon was being loaded in the field. The younger boys pulled the shocks apart and with pitchfork tossed the sheaves, one at a time, onto the wagon. Older fellows usually worked the wagon, since it was important for the sheaves to be placed in a careful, orderly way. Otherwise, the load might shift, spilling the sheaves into a tangled mess.

Once loaded, we headed toward the barn and the rising din of machinery. The thresher's hum and clatter with the tractor engine's full-throttle roar mingled into a deafening clamor, punctuated by the "wuum, wuum, wuum" of sheaves being forked into the machine's maw. Hulled grain poured from chutes into burlap bags, to be tied and carried to a storage area, while the straw, used as winter bedding for the animals, was blown into the large loft. Of all the tasks involved with threshing, working in the straw loft had to be

among the worst. Imagine being caught in a hot windstorm with a constant rain of loose swirling straw. That was what it was like for the men who took turns forking and packing straw into the loft's far corners.

Numerous persons worked for us on the farm over the years. I recall Manas Hochstetler with particular fondness. A bachelor, who worked for his room and board, he was the finest friend a little girl could want. I was often plagued with severe earache, and while use of tobacco was strictly forbidden for members of the Kempsville church, Manas came from Indiana where smoking was tolerated among the Amish. Now and again, when I cried from the pain, he would light up a cigar and breathe the warm, soothing smoke into my ear. Sometimes in the evening after supper, I climbed onto his lap to be rocked, while he slowly kept the chair moving with his foot.

Manas decided to go back to Indiana after several years. The evening he left, Mother summoned me to bid him "Good-bye." I was too heartsick for the task, and asked her to pass on my farewell. Though Manas might have had some romantic interest in Mary King, one of our hired girls, he never married. He and I kept up a friendly correspondence until his death at age ninety-three, in 1976.

Until after World War II, the railroad tracks bisecting our farm were the main transportation link from Norfolk, across rural Princess Anne County to the Virginia Beach ocean-

front. An earlier electrified trolley was later replaced with a motorized railbus, which made numerous stops on the regularly scheduled runs. The most important stops for us Kempsville folks were Euclid at the Witchduck Road crossing and Beech Grove, just behind Mary and Amanda Beiler's present home on Yoder Lane.

An amusing incident occurred one day while Dad was waiting at the Beech Grove station—a small three-walled building along the north side of the tracks. Benches for waiting passengers lined the inside walls. Dad had dozed off when he was suddenly roused. He knew instinctively what the warning rumble meant—the congregation members' shuffling feet on the bare wooden floor at church as they knelt for prayer. Not to be caught napping, he quickly fell to his knees, coming fully awake only as the railbus whooshed by.

Remembering the sad and near-tragic events of one's life is not an easy task; however, numerous as they seem to have been in our family, this account would not be complete without mentioning the important ones.

Brother Rufus came near being seriously hurt, if not murdered, one evening after Pluckett, a neighbor's son-in-law, accused Rufus of having shot his dog. Rufus told him he had not, but Pluckett, enraged, refused to listen and stormed off, threatening to return. We were in the barn milking when Rufus saw him coming. He went into the granary to hide. Mother, not grasping

the danger, told Rufus to come out, else Pluckett would certainly consider him guilty. As they were coming through the hay alley, Trixie, the dog, ran ahead toward the open door. Pluckett shot the instant he saw movement. The bullet caught Trixie in the mouth, seriously wounding her. We took her to the vet, who performed surgery and she recovered. Rufus always maintained afterward that Trixie had saved his life.

Bertha was milking a cow only a few feet from where Trixie was struck. Needless to say, we were all quite shaken over the incident. As for Pluckett; he turned around and went home, the shot apparently having cooled his anger. Later, someone else came forward and admitted having shot Pluckett's dog while it was killing farm animals. Despite learning he had accused and nearly shot an innocent person, Pluckett never came back to apologize for his behavior.

Scary as that encounter was, it cannot compare with the sorrow over the untimely deaths we have dealt with over the years. Sister Bertha and husband, Paul Brenneman, lost their first child, eighteen-month-old Pauline, following a three-day bout with pneumonia. January 25, 1959, Paul, himself, and their 11-year-old daughter, Martha, died in an auto accident along Witchduck Road, while on the way home from a Sunday church service.

Three of brother Melvin and wife Katie's sons perished in accidents. The oldest, Raymond, died in a plane crash while stationed with the U.S. Air Force



Rufus Yoder, circa 1937. Courtesy of C. H. "Curly" Byler

Untimely Deaths within the Kempsville Community 1949–1965

The sense of community and belonging has long been a strength among Amish and Mennonites. This quality is probably no more evident than when disaster strikes an individual or family. The larger group is immediately drawn into the circle of suffering. Of course, close relatives and friends are more actively involved as caregivers, but even those farther removed are emotionally affected.

Because of its relatively small size—200 to 250 adults and children in the early 1950s—the Kempsville congregation was keenly touched when an accident or death occurred within the community.

A Winter Sunday's Double Fatality

by Leon Zook

Twenty-two-year-old Paul Brenneman, a native of Grantsville, Maryland, arrived in the Kempsville Amish community in the fall of 1940. A year later, he married Bertha, the oldest of Lloyd W. and Amelia Yoder's daughters. Paul was ordained as a minister at the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church in April 1955. Six months later, in October, he was ordained bishop. Now he shouldered responsibilities as church leader, husband, father, and full-time dairy farmer.

The January 25 Sunday forenoon had run a rather normal course for the Brenneman family. Paul and the five oldest children had gone to the Sunday school service at the Kempsville Church. At the time in 1959, the congregation still kept the traditional schedule of preaching services every second Sunday, with Sunday school on the Sunday between. This forenoon Mother Bertha had stayed home with the three youngest, Fern, Dorcas, and baby Ida Marie. The family had been invited to the Yost Zook home for lunch, and Paul and the older children planned to return for Bertha and the three little girls after Sunday school.

Paul and his children—Martha, eleven; Donnie, nine; Alton, eight; and Rhoda, six—left the church shortly past noon bound for home on Witchduck Road, a mile north of Virginia Beach Boulevard. The Brennemens' oldest daughter, Ruth, thirteen, had gone home with a friend. The Brenneman car traveled north on two-lane Witchduck, crossed the Boulevard and had reached a point about half a mile from home, when an approaching car swerved into their lane. Paul apparently swung left to avoid a collision. At the moment, the on-coming driver crossed back into his lane. The vehicles struck head-on.

Meanwhile, the hour grew late and the Yost Zook family decided to sit down to lunch with other invited guests. The Brennemens had apparently been delayed and could be served when they arrived. However, as dessert was being served, a phone call brought a word of the auto accident. The caller lacked details, but there was no doubt, things at the crash site appeared extremely grave.

Leaving the unfinished meal, Zooks and their guests rushed to the scene, only to learn the heartbreaking news. Martha Brenneman, eleven, had died instantly in the collision and Paul, forty, died before he could be transported to a hospital. The boys, Donnie and Alton, were hospitalized with injuries that would keep them there through their father and sister's double funeral several days later. Six-year-old Rhoda seemed not to be seriously hurt and was allowed to go home.

Violent death is a traumatic experience in any event. Surviving family members and friends find their memories seared by images—real and imagined—of a loved one's life torn away in a



Paul Brenneman, circa 1948. Courtesy of Mrs. Clark Yoder



Martha Brenneman, Anna Miller, and Ruby Miller, circa 1957. Courtesy of Bertha Brenneman

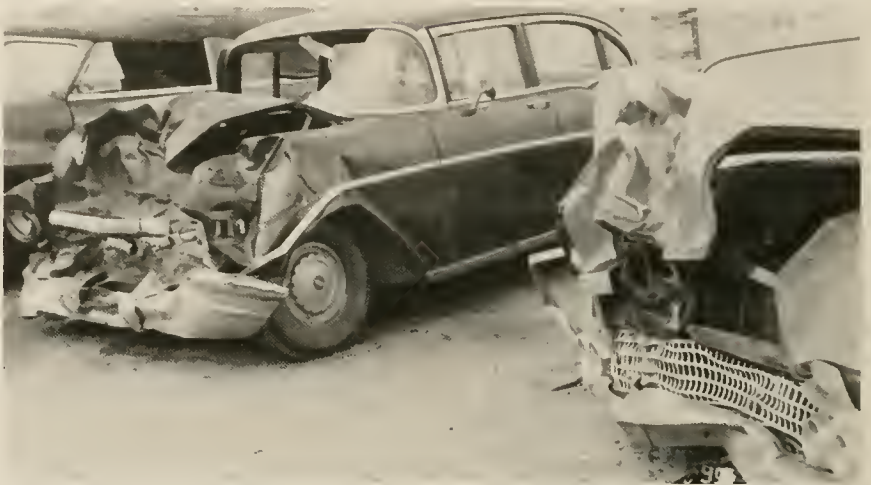
moment. However, people of faith find hope amid the deepest sorrow.

The morning after the tragedy, Martha Brenneman's schoolmates assembled in the large classroom at Kempsville Mennonite School. Monday devotionals, in which all students and teachers joined, had been the first activity of the week since the school opened in 1947. Several opening hymns by young voices, just beginning to blend in four-part harmony, reverberated from the wooden floor and desks and bounced off the hard-plaster walls and high ceiling. The rich, sweet tones poured forth youthful joy, trust, promise for the future and more. Afterward one of the ministers from church would share a meditation or story with a Biblical theme.

This morning, though, was like no other. Gone was the usual exuberance. Those who weren't weeping, were red-eyed and sober. Sadly, a voice took up A. J. Gordon's melody of the old hymn: "My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine; . . . If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now . . . I will love Thee in life, I will love Thee in death. . . ."

More voices joined as the hymn progressed to the fourth and last stanza: "In mansions of glory . . . I'll sing with a glittering crown on my brow, If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now."

God offers hope in the worst of circumstances!



The 1957 Chevrolet in which Paul and Martha Brenneman were killed in 1959. Courtesy of Harold Overholt



Paul Brenneman as a young man, circa 1938. Courtesy of Ida Brenneman

Paul and Bertha Brenneman and their daughter Pauline in 1943. Courtesy of Ida Brenneman



Paul and Bertha Brenneman, ready to milk the cows, 1942. Courtesy of Ida Brenneman



The Paul Brenneman farm from 1943 to 1959 on Witchduck Road, circa 1954. Today, the lane seen behind the farm is Kellam Road. Courtesy of Bertha (Yoder) Brenneman



The former Paul Brenneman house, seen here in 1995, was moved about a quarter-mile south and is now at 500 North Witchduck Road. Courtesy of Leon R. Zook

Bertha Brenneman taking care of foster children in 1964. Courtesy of Leroy Miler

in Germany. Melvin Lloyd Jr. was fatally injured in an auto accident on an icy road in Ohio. Allen was killed by a bull on the home farm at Montezuma, Georgia.

Brother Menno and Alma's three-month-old son, Ivan, died of a congenital heart defect. Years later, their eight-year-old Elva Mae died in a horrible farm machinery accident. Brother Rufus and Mary's daughter, Bertha, was killed during a tornado, one month after marriage to Henry Brenneman. In 1982, sister Elva's husband, Menno

Beiler, died suddenly of a heart attack.

For lack of space, I will refrain from describing the narrow escapes, except for two that involved me. As a five-year-old, I nearly succumbed after eating castor beans. On another occasion, while driving tractor, a rope swing caught on the wheel hub, flipping the machine that barely missed landing on me.

By the early 1950s restlessness had again crept into the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite community. A decade earlier the growing hazards of highway



Sol and Cora Yoder. Courtesy of Henry Overholt



The children of Crist Yoder, circa 1951. Left to right: Marvin, Amanda, Elva, Matilda, Rhoda, Cora, and Arlene. Courtesy of Irene Peachey



Bertha L. Yoder, circa 1940. Courtesy of Bertha (Yoder) Brenneman

traffic had helped push the horse and buggy group to relocate in rural Shenandoah Valley. As then, the concern now was also driven by the changing landscape. The military buildup related to the Cold War brought rapid population growth to the Hampton Roads area. Real estate development drove up land prices, making it attractive for some farmers to sell their farms.

Uncles Noah, Rudy, Crist, and Sol Yoder were among the first of dad's brothers to sell and move to Montezuma, Georgia. While Crist's and Sol's farms along Holland Road were bought by Amish-Mennonite farm-

ers—Joe Mast and Fred Overholt respectively—Uncle Rudy's farm, and Uncle Enos's became part of the Aragona Village development. The Kempsville Meadows Golf Course on Princess Anne Road was built on Uncle Noah's farm.

The year 1954 saw the beginning of many changes for the Lloyd W. Yoder family. Yost Zooks from Belleville, Pennsylvania, moved into our 'upstairs apartment and took over the farm operation. Mother died of cancer in October 1955. Dad was manager at Yoder dairies in Kempsville at the time. The following year, he married Salome Kinsinger. In 1957, Dad, stepmother Salome; brothers Melvin, Rufus, and Menno with their families; as well as my husband, Lloyd Swartzentruber, and I had all moved to Montezuma, Georgia, where we live yet today. Dad and Salome, of course, are no longer living. Sisters Bertha and Elva still live at their homes off Salem Road in Virginia Beach. Looking back over the years, I realize our family's story is not unlike that of many others—periods of joy mingled with grief. However, with the painful events has come a sense of God's presence and sustaining grace even in the most difficult of times. We have seen His protective care on many occasions, and the abundance of his blessings to us is beyond measure. Praise His name!



Elva L. Yoder, circa 1945. Courtesy of Elva (Yoder) Beiler

Flowers for the Master's Bouquet

by Leon R. Zook

Yost and Amelia Zook and their seven children arrived in the Kempsville community from Belleville, Pennsylvania, in early 1954. They moved into the small house on the former Simon L. Yoder farm, a mile and one-half east of Kempsville on Princess Anne Road. After less than a year, they moved to the second-story residence in the Lloyd W. Yoder farmhouse off Parliament Drive.

Though well acquainted earlier, a strong attachment quickly developed between the Zook and Yoder families. Lloyd and Amelia's children were all grown and gone from home, and they—a warm, friendly couple—readily took on the role as surrogate parents and grandparents to the younger Zook family.

Nowhere was the bond more evident than with fifty-eight-year-old Amelia Yoder and nine-year-old Katie Zook. Though a half-century separated the pair, their friendship was genuine. Both loved flowers and with spring coming on they planned a summer flower garden. They would put in strawflowers and maybe, zinnias, something with bright color. Midst the anticipation, however, hung a touch of melancholy—sometimes bordering on fear, though they didn't speak about it. For sometime, Amelia had been plagued with unexplained spells of tiredness. Now, the doctor had made the grim diagnosis: a malignant stomach tumor was sapping her strength. Nevertheless, she found energy to help Katie plant the flower seeds.

As the seedlings grew, so did Amelia Yoder's cancer. By early summer she was bedfast. The flowers came into bloom, and alone, Katie gathered them into bouquets to carry to her ailing friend. The flowers added pleasant color to the sickroom, but more, they blessed both woman and child. The little girl's compassion lifted Amelia's spirits, and Katie found Amelia's smile and kind words a greater treasure than money.

Summer wore on. Abruptly, Yost and Amelia Zook noticed a growing listlessness in Katie. Their normally energetic nine-year-old would stop to rest going to and from the mailbox, less than two hundred yards from the house. The Zooks made a doctor's appointment in mid-August. Tests came back quickly with the dreadful word—leukemia. Although there was little to offer at the time in the form of treatment, Katie was admitted to the small hospital near the Virginia Beach oceanfront. However, after two weeks, her condition had worsened so much the family was told nothing more could be done at the hospital. Yost and Amelia took their daughter home to die, a week later, on September 8, 1955.

Meanwhile, downstairs in the same house, Amelia Yoder was living out her last days on earth. She died exactly one month after Katie on October 8, 1955. Just a bit more than six months after planting their flower seeds, the two friends were themselves gathered by the Master Gardener into His eternal bouquet.

Old Virginia Beach Hospital at Twenty-fifth Street and Arctic Avenue. Courtesy of Virginia Beach Hospital (Dee Dee Becker)



This 1957 side view of the Lloyd Yoder farmhouse shows the stairs to the upper apartment where the Zooks lived. Courtesy of Irene Peachey



Amelia Yoder and Katie Zook. Courtesy of Leon R. Zook



**Viola Yoder, 1947. Courtesy
of Viola (Yoder)
Swartzentruber**



**Lloyd Yoder family, circa
1990. Standing left to right:
Menno, Rufus, and Melvin.
Seated: Bertha, Viola,
Salome (stepmother), and
Elva. Courtesy of Viola
(Yoder) Swartzentruber**

**Menno Beiler farm,
currently 4768 Witchduck
Road. Courtesy of Elva
(Yoder) Beiler**





Former Menno Beiler house at 4768 North Witchduck Road, 1995. Courtesy of Leon R. Zook



The Menno Beiler family moved to 2264 Salem Road in 1958. The farm is still standing and was the last dairy farm in operation in Virginia Beach. It ceased operations in 1983. Courtesy of Leon R. Zook



Mark Brenneman farm, circa 1970, current site of Brenneman Farm Condominiums on Princess Anne Road one-quarter mile north of Providence Road. Courtesy of Leroy Miller

The Christian J. and Susanna ('Beachy') Swartzentruber Family

PART I

by Eldon Swartzentruber

SETTLING IN A NEW LOCATION WAS nothing new for my grandpa Christian J. Swartzentruber's family, when they arrived at Kempsville, Virginia, in the fall of 1913. Shortly after he married Susanna Beachy in 1890, the couple moved from Somerset County, Pennsylvania, to the new Amish settlement at Midland, in Fauquier County, Virginia. Around the turn of the century, they left there for Plain City, Ohio, where my dad, Jonas, was born in 1908.

Three years later, in 1911, the Swartzentrubers were off to southwest Texas—Dimmit County, near the village of Palm. That venture lasted a bit over two years, before the family gave up in despair. While the irrigated

land there produced excellent crops of onions, cabbage, and potatoes shipping and commissions charges to northern markets amounted to more than the produce brought.

Probably several reasons contributed to my grandparents choosing to move to Princess Anne County—now Virginia Beach—however, primary was the freedom to quit school after seventh grade. Ohio, and several other states were beginning to pass laws requiring school attendance until age sixteen. Grandma's brother Daniel Beachy's family was also living here, which undoubtedly played a role in the move to Tidewater Virginia.

Grandpa's bought land south of Kempsville and farmed until his death in October 1933. Grandma sold the farm at auction to John B. Yoder in 1939. Grandma died in June 1944, and both are buried in the Kempsville Mennonite Church cemetery off Parliament Drive.

The John Yoders later sold the place to the Levi Kauffman family, who farmed it until their move to Montezuma, Georgia, in the summer of 1953. Rock Church stands on the property today, although the farm buildings were farther east than the present church site.

Jonas Swartzentruber's children, circa 1955. Back row, left to right: Lloyd, Catherine, Susan, and Norman. Middle row: Ray, Daniel, and Bertha. Front row: Noah, Eldon, and Merlin. Courtesy of Lloyd Swartzentruber



Grandpa Christian was ordained minister while living in Fauquier County, Virginia, and served faithfully in that office until his death. That his interest went well beyond preaching the Word on Sundays was plainly evident in the old church building on Parliament Drive. Built around 1914, the wood-boarded interior remained unpainted until the 1950s. The material, from Kramer Brothers Lumber in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, had been shipped by rail to Kempsville. Addressed to Grandpa, each bundle was stenciled “C. J. Swartzentruber.” The labeled boards were scattered about the walls and were readable until covered with paint.

After the church property was sold during the early 1980s, I went there while the building was being renovated. To my good fortune, I managed to retrieve one of the stenciled boards that had been turned out and escaped being painted. I am happy to have it in my possession to this day.

My Dad, Jonas, and Mom, Anna, were married in 1929. Her parents were Jonas C. and Catherine (Yonas and Kettie) Miller. Dad was ordained deacon at the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church in 1946. I am the oldest of ten children—nine still living. Neither parent is living today. Mom died February 7, 1970, and Dad on Christmas Day, 1980.

Mom’s death came on the morning of the day my youngest brother, Merlin, married Katie Ann Chupp. For the first time in five years all of our

family were planning to be together. Needless to say, the event turned out far less joyful than we had anticipated.

We were living in Kempsville at the time. Mom and Dad had come from Montezuma, Georgia, since the Chupp family also lived in Virginia. Dads were staying overnight at my sister Catherine’s, the Joe Troyers. Mom had a heart attack towards morning. As I was a member of the Kempsville Rescue Squad, Dad called me to bring the ambulance. Having worked hundreds of emergencies over the years, I saw at once this was extremely serious. I must say it was the most difficult ambulance run I ever made. Mom died before we reached the hospital.

Growing up in old Princess Anne County during the 1930s and 1940s was, overall, a pleasant experience. Though life on a dairy farm kept us busy, there was also time for trips to the ocean beaches and fishing on Chesapeake Bay. As a young fellow, I particularly enjoyed the party boat trips out from Harrison’s at Ocean View. Sometimes, after a good catch of croakers or spot our church youth group would top off the day with a fish fry.

Farm boys are often looking for ways to make spending money. My brothers and I were no exception. Because a number of the Kempsville Mennonite families attended Norfolk City Market, there was a ready outlet for whatever saleable goods we could find. Our specialty was squabs—young pigeons. We put nesting boxes in the hayloft to attract wild pigeons. Just before the



Jonas C. Swartzentruber, circa 1968.
Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Miller



Anna (Miller) Swartzentruber, circa 1968.
Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Miller

young birds were ready to fly, we'd catch and dress them for market. There were no federal meat inspections to be concerned with at the time. The handful of young pigeon could not have competed with a plump chicken, but customers thought squab a real delicacy. For us, that was what mattered.

In my late teens, I began working at Yoder Dairies, first in the plant and later as a milk delivery man. The dairy, founded in 1929, by the brothers, Elmer and Eli, furnished employment for a lot of persons over the past sixty-five years. A number of marriages resulted when fellows in the plant or delivery routes fell in love with girls from the office staff. Some made a lifetime career of "working at the Dairy." I came close with thirty-five years there.

The Kempsville Amish-Mennonite community has seeded a good number of other congregations: In the early 1940s, a number of families left for Stuarts Draft, Virginia; the Providence (Conservative) Church was formed in 1952; upwards of two dozen families moved to Montezuma, Georgia, after 1953. During the 1960s and 1970s

others settled at Franklin, Kentucky; Farmville, Virginia; and Abbeville, South Carolina.

As a point of reference for younger readers and others who may not know, I'll give a bit of information on present-day Swartzentruber family connections. Laura, my first wife, died in 1988. Leora, formerly Overholt, and I were married in 1993 and are presently living at Abbeville, South Carolina. My brothers, Norman, Ray, and Merlin, also live here in South Carolina. Lloyd and Daniel live at Montezuma, Georgia. Noah lived at Fort Wayne, Indiana, at the time of his death in 1980. Sister Catherine, Mrs. Joe Troyer, lives at Farmville, Virginia; Susan, Mrs. Daniel Yoder, in Costa Rica; and Bertha, Mrs. Allen Yoder, in Missouri.

It is my sincere desire that past residents of the Kempsville community reading this will recall their own fond memories, and join me in saying, "It was good to have been there."

PART 2

by Lloyd Swartzentruber

I WAS BORN SEPTEMBER 24, 1931, at Kempsville. Our parents were living on what was then known as the Noah Lee farm. Among other Amish-Mennonite families who lived there later were John Beilers, Simon L. Yoders, Elmer V. Millers, Joas B. "J. B." Millers, and Isaac Planks.

Dad was a dairyman, as were most of the Kempsville Amish farmers, and

The Jonas Swartzentruber residence was on the site of the present Kempsville High School. Courtesy of Lloyd Swartzentruber



after moving onto the farm just south of the village, Dad enlarged the cow barn to twenty-eight stalls. As the milking was done by hand until 1950, we older children learned this chore at a young age. That changed, however, after Dad purchased a DeLaval milking machine with two buckets at an auction. He brought the equipment home and unloaded it at the barn. The following day, he went off to Norfolk on business. Returning in the evening, much to his surprise, we boys had installed the machine and were using it.

Kempsville was a typical country village until commercial and residential development began to bring changes after 1950. Huge oak trees shaded a dozen or more well-kept homes. Watson Kedras' hardware store stood between Pleasant Hall—presently Kellum Funeral Home—and the Niles Wolfe home on the northwest corner of Princess Anne and Bonney Roads. There were two general stores, Edgar Herrick's was directly across Bonney from the Wolfe residence. Later, Albert Bonney Sr. owned the store after Mr. Herrick's retirement.

A hundred or so feet east of the intersection, the railroad cut diagonally across Princess Anne Road, and approximately the same distance south, the tracks bisected Kempsville Road. The second of the village's general stores, located just beyond the railroad was owned by George Denny and Jack Brinkley.

Mother sent me to Edgar Herrick's store one day to buy some groceries.

She gave me a nickel to spend for myself. A nickel then had value—it would buy a five-stick pack of chewing gum, twelve-ounce bottle of Pepsi or a candy bar. Those items may have tempted me sometimes, but this time I had something else in mind.

There were usually several men loitering about the store, and on occasion I had seen them slip nickels into the slot machine, pull the lever and set the three wheels spinning. Sometimes upon stopping, a wheel would display an apple, a lemon, or other fruit. Though I didn't understand all the machine's workings, I knew it occasionally spit out several coins. It seemed like easy money to this nine-year-old and too tempting to pass up. Easing up to the machine, I carefully slipped my nickel in and pulled the lever. The wheels whirled, slowed and the first stopped on a cherry, the second did the same. The third coasted to a stop, also showing a cherry. I had hit the jackpot! Coins began dropping out of the machine, overflowing the small tray and rolling onto the floor. Panicked at this unexpected bonanza, I looked up to see the men all staring at me. I felt a rush of guilt—Amish-Mennonites were not supposed to gamble, I knew that and so did they. Without thought, I turned and ran for home fast as I could, forgetting in my haste to retrieve the nickel that really was mine.

By the time I reached my late teens, volunteer firefighting had become an important focal point in my life. At age



The Jonas Swartzentruber farm is on the left looking south in this 1963 aerial shot of Kempsville. Courtesy of Nobe Smith



seventeen, brother Eldon had joined the Davis Corner volunteers, and I followed soon as I was old enough. While there, I advanced to the rank of captain. After a couple years at Davis Corner, interest had grown for a department at Kempsville. A public meeting for interested persons was held at Yoder Dairies in 1950. Out of that came Kempsville Volunteer Fire Department.

Mr. Linwood Wright, Menno L. Yoder (my brother-in-law), and I drew up the first bylaws for the new department. We had a major boost for morale early on from William Hudgins, Princess Anne County clerk and a neighboring farmer of ours. Initially, our fledgling fire company planned to buy a used truck from salvor Sam Aks. However Mr. Hudgins offered to contribute \$1,000 toward a new Ford truck, providing we bought it from Bartee Motor Company at Princess Anne Courthouse (Virginia Beach City Hall). As a result, Kempsville Volunteer Fire Department began operations with a brand-new truck.

The Kempsville Mennonite community was well represented in the department. Among the members, besides myself, were my brothers, Eldon, Norman, and Ray Swartzentruber; Clark, Menno, Edwin, and Floyd Yoder; Paul and Solly Beiler; John H. Miller; Tommy Overholt; and Isaac Plank.

Church life was a vital part of my childhood and young adult years in the Kempsville community. Until the church split around 1940, Mom and Dad drove horse and buggy as did all the members. However, after the Beachy Church was organized (Elmer S. Yoder describes the events in chapter 11) our parents soon bought an automobile. Several things I particularly recall about the church grounds: the old horse barn with a hayloft overhead; a horse watering trough, replenished with the overflow from the pitcher

pump on the back porch of the church house. A concrete ramp that ran straight out from the porch steps allowed ladies and small children to step onto a waiting buggy, rather than climbing up from the ground.

For several years after the church divided, both congregations shared the meetinghouse. The practice then was for preaching services only every other Sunday. On Sundays when the Old Order group had forenoon church services, the Beachy (automobile) group would have afternoon Sunday school. The following Sunday they had the forenoon service. The sharing continued until around 1942, when most of the horse-and-buggy folks had moved to Stuarts Draft in the Shenandoah Valley.

Like nearly all Amish congregations where the German language is used during worship, the “Loblied” (Praise Hymn) was always sung as the second hymn in the Sunday morning church service. We used the more modern *Lieder Sammlung* (Hymns Collection) hymnbook, rather than the much older and thicker *Ausbund*.

Singing without instrumental music accompaniment has been a tenet of Amish-Mennonites since our sixteenth-century beginnings. We sing not only at church, but at social activities and at home. We boys often sang while going about our evening barn chores.

Since there were no evening services then at the Kempsville Church, the young people would gather at a church family’s home for a Sunday evening

singing. We would open with several German hymns, then switch to English in the old Mennonite Church and Sunday School Hymnal. Hymns were announced by number and anyone brave enough to lead was free to do so. While singing at church was only in unison, four-part harmony was permitted at the less formal Sunday evening events. Singings usually lasted until 9:00–9:30 p.m. By then someone would announce a “parting hymn” number that signaled the end of the song service. Favorite hymns included, No. 399, “Blest Be the Tie”; No. 405, “God Be With You”; and No. 409, “Hail, Sweetest, Dearest Tie.”

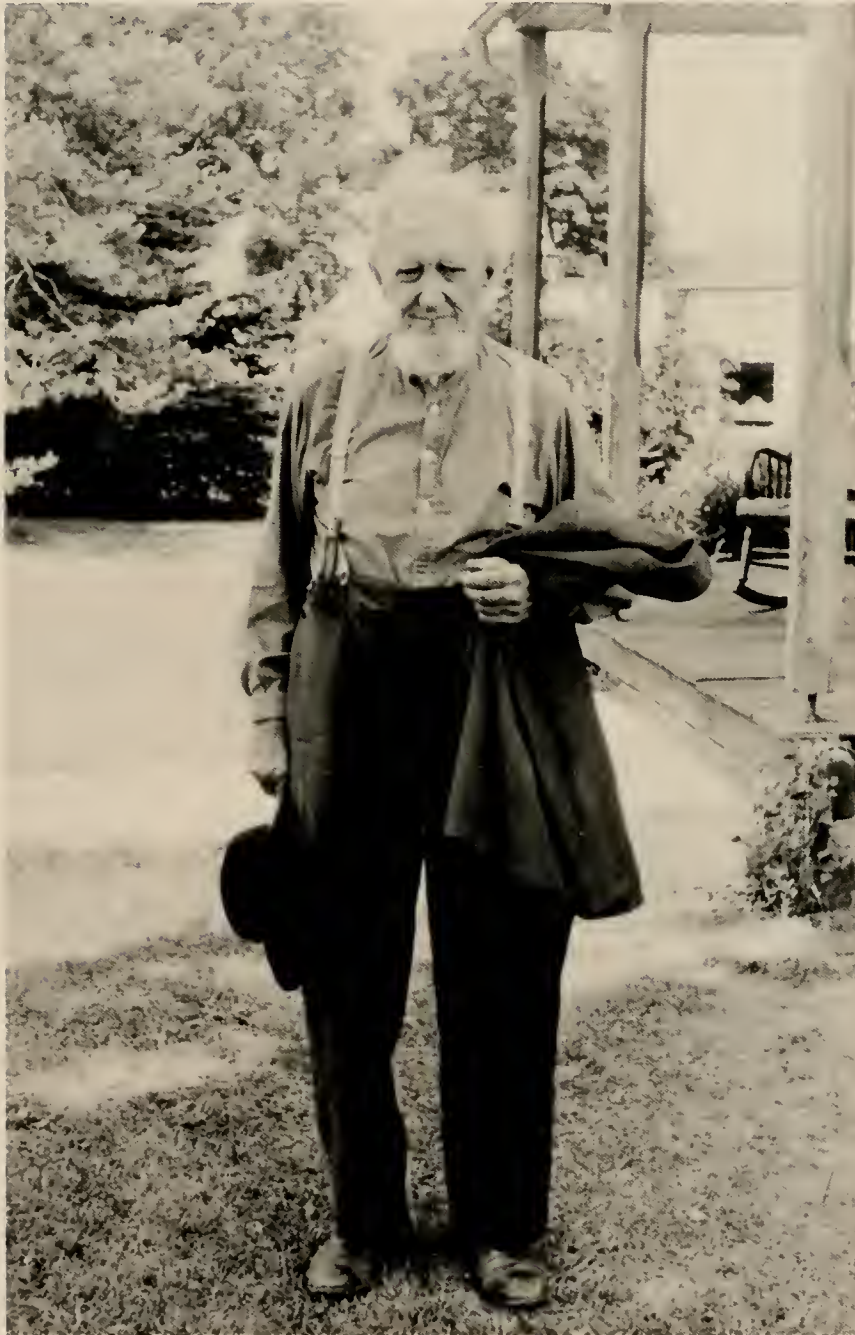
At age twenty-one on August 26, 1952, I married Viola, youngest daughter of Lloyd W. and Amelia Yoder. (Viola has written the William S. Yoder account in chapter 5.) We lived on in the Kempsville area until I was drafted into 1W alternative service in 1955. We lived two years in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, while I worked at a mental hospital. Following that we moved with Viola’s dad and step-mother, Salome, to Montezuma, Georgia, where we still live today.

Eli S. and Mattie (Helmuth) Miller Family

by Mary (Miller) Yoder

THOUGH I LOVED BOOKS AND ENJOYED school, my formal education ended at age twelve with our family's move from Plain City, Ohio, to Princess

Eli S. Miller. Courtesy
of Joseph A. Miller



Anne County, Virginia. The public auction in March 1919, came just two months before the school term ended. Seventy-six years have gone by since, but I have never forgotten the disappointment I felt at seeing my school-books sold that day. Mama and Dad said the textbooks in Virginia would be different from those in Ohio. However, more importantly, without compulsory attendance laws, there was no incentive to re-enroll me in a Virginia school. Had we remained in Ohio, I would have been obligated to attend classes until age sixteen.

My oldest brother, Jonas, had arrived earlier in the Kempsville community and was working for Iddo Yoders. Jonas' urging was partly responsible for our parents' decision to relocate there. Dad and one or two other persons rode with the farm animals in a boxcar, while Mama and we children, including sixteen-year-old Fred, traveled by passenger train to Norfolk. There we were met by Jake and Lydia Stutzman who took us to their home near Greenwich. We stayed only briefly with the Stutzmans before moving to the thirty-six-acre farm Dad bought for \$100 per acre from Ira D. Yoder, brother of Iddo, three-fourths mile east of Kempsville along Princess Anne Road. Dad and Mother kept the property until their retirement in the 1940s. My brother, Steve, owned

the place after that, selling off a plot or two over the years until 1988, when the last fourteen acres were bought by Virginia Power for \$1.6 million.

Tidewater Virginia offered advantages that central Ohio lacked. We particularly enjoyed the mild climate and the Atlantic Ocean. Day trips to Virginia Beach were a delightful adventure. Boarding the trolley at Euclid (Witchduck Road), we rode across the rural countryside to the oceanfront, a strip of sand with several small hotels and widely scattered summer houses.

Back then, strict dress codes were in force at public beaches. A lady's suit was to have short sleeves, a knee-length skirt and stockings, and male bodies covered from neck to knees. Even with that, coming out of the water, bathers were not to loiter on the beach, but were expected to go directly to the bathhouse and change into proper attire.

One thing that was less than pleasant was the atrocious condition of the roads during wet spells. Most were unimproved dirt tracks. Even the road into Norfolk became all but impassable near the Broad Creek bridge. Once brother Fred and I were on the way to Norfolk with the market wagon and two-horse team, mud rose to the horses' knees, and we were forced to let them rest before slogging on.

Farming was not one of Dad's strong points, along with that, our small, poorly drained acreage seldom produced bumper crops; however, what agricultural skills he may have lacked



Mattie (Helmuth) Miller. Courtesy of Joseph A. Miller

Dad made up for with a bounty of good humor. On one occasion a passerby remarked about our sparse wheat crop, to which Dad replied, "Yes, the boys set the shocks too far apart."

Another time, someone made a disparaging comment about the corn. "Yes, well," came Dad's reply, "This year we're growing the stalks, next year we'll grow the ears."

Dad was probably at his best with a humorous rejoinder, but he could also initiate a funny episode. While attending the curbside market in downtown Norfolk, he posted a sign on a wire cage: "See the Ground Hog." The curious crowd pressed close for a peek at some furry animal, only to find themselves staring at a container of pork sausage. Another delicacy our customers often asked for was pork brains. One raw, cold day a client

inquired, "You got brains, Mr. Miller?" Without hesitation Dad responded, "No, Ma'am. If I had, I wouldn't be out in this weather."

Dad dabbled in various endeavors—carpentry, watch and clock repair—sometimes working at that late at night—and bee-keeping. Gentle-natured and conscientious in dealing with others, he usually underpriced his services, selling honey for thirty-five cents a pint. Called to task by family or friend for his low prices, Dad would point out he did not want to risk rebuke at Heaven's gate for having overcharged someone here on earth.

From the beginning, we developed a deep appreciation for the feeling of community that prevailed in the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church. A few years after our arrival Dad and minister Christian J. Swartzentruber began to press for the organization of a Sunday school. Although there was some opposition to this new program, the idea caught on with a majority of

the members. Classes were held at first only during the summer months, but later became year-round. Several families found Sunday school too great a break with tradition and moved to Dover, Delaware, as a result.

During the summer of 1921, eight young people received instruction in a pre-baptismal and church membership class. Among those were Eli D. Beachy; John and Elmer Lee; Enos W., his sister Katie, and Norman M. Yoder; Amanda Swartzentruber; and I, Mary E. Miller. Presently, in the spring of 1995, Katie (Yoder) Hershberger and I are the only two yet living.

Seven years after our baptism, Enos W. Yoder and I were married September 4, 1928, at the Kempsville Church. Enos had taken over the operation of his parents' farm earlier. Mother and Dad Yoder, William S. and Amanda, moved into a smaller home owned by their daughter Annie, while we set up housekeeping in their big farmhouse off North Witchduck Road. Here ten



Mary (Miller) and Enos Yoder.
Courtesy of Joseph A. Miller

children were born to us: Edwin, Floyd, Sadie, Claude, Allen, Vernie, Alta, Melvin, Norman, and Mary.

Our family had its ups and downs, both minor and major. Around age six, Edwin developed nephritis, an ailment where the kidneys are unable to rid the body of excess fluid. As a result, our son's body would become grotesquely swollen. Treatment was difficult and recovery slow, but with proper medication and a doctor's care, Edwin eventually regained his health. Three-year-old Floyd came near losing his life as he attempted to climb onto the tractor while the hired man was backing up. The driver stopped at the last instant, but not before the rear wheel had broken Floyd's leg and left a steel cleat mark on his lower abdomen.

On another occasion, Allen, playing on a rope swing, had his thigh badly fractured when an older brother bumped into him with the tractor. Unfortunately the leg was stretched too hard in traction, leaving Allen with a permanent limp.

Certainly, while living in Virginia, our family's most traumatic event occurred in February 1947. The temperature hovered around zero that Sunday morning. Our water heater was connected to the kitchen range, with a relief pipe running to the third floor attic. Unaware that moisture in the relief pipe had frozen solid, I entered the kitchen with two-year-old Norman toddling behind. Suddenly without warning the water heater exploded, spewing live steam and boiling water

across the kitchen. Though momentarily stunned by the force of the blast, we quickly realized little Norman had been badly scalded.

Though we had a phone, emergency 911 was still many years in the future, and even the nearest ambulance was in Norfolk fifteen miles away. For us, calling an ambulance was not an option. On rare occasions when one had to be summoned into Princess Anne County, it could take as long as ninety minutes to arrive.

We carried our son to the car and rushed him to Leigh Memorial Hospital at Mowbray Arch in Norfolk. There, the attending physician informed us the burns were superficial. Though medically untrained, we found it difficult to believe the doctor's reassuring words; however, at the time, a lay person hardly dared question professional medical opinion.

Norman was placed in a glass-enclosed room from which we were barred. After a time, we set out for home, planning to return the next day. Overnight and the following morning we had no word from the hospital. Not until we arrived there were we given the grim news—Norman no longer lived. Though we knew our little boy had gone to be with the Lord, it was difficult at first to accept reality.

The doctor then requested and we consented to an autopsy. Only in the written report did we learn the hospital staff had known almost from the beginning that Norman's condition was grave. His body was losing fluid faster



John H. Miller working in his garden.
Courtesy of Leroy Miller

than it could be replaced. We buried our ninth child and youngest son in the Kempsville Church cemetery on February 12, 1947. If anything can be added to this sad account, it is this: the hospital's doctor never sent us a bill.

By the early 1950s urbanization began spreading into northwest

Princess Anne County. John Aragona developed Diamond Springs, and other subdivisions sprang up. With our long-time agricultural ties, and children growing to adulthood, we recognized opportunities for farming in the area would become increasingly more scarce. At the same time other Kempsville

Amish-Mennonite families were reaching the same conclusions. Approximately a dozen families bought farms in 1953 and moved to the Montezuma area of Macon County, Georgia. More followed in later years. We joined the migration in the autumn of 1954. John Aragona paid \$500 per acre for our five hundred acres that straddled Witchduck in the area where Aragona Boulevard and Witchduck Road intersect.

Time brings changes to every family and the past forty years have brought many to mine. Mother, Mattie, passed on in June 1953 while we were still living in Virginia. Dad died of congestive heart failure at Sarasota, Florida, in 1957. Our children have become grandparents and presented us with 165 great-grandchildren. Husband Enos passed away August 31, 1985, four days before our fifty-seventh wedding anniversary. At this writing, early 1995, only sisters Florence and Sadie, brother Steve, and I are left. Brothers Jonas and Fred are buried in Florida, and John beside our parents in the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church cemetery off Parliament Drive in Virginia Beach.

Today, I live in a trailer home at my daughter Alta's, the Marvin Kauffman family, near Montezuma, Georgia. At age eighty-nine, one is forced to slow down, though I still drive my car around the community. Distant travel leaves me dependent on someone younger. In the spring of 1995, I rode with son Allen and his wife, Pauline, on a trip to northern Indiana and back.



John H. Miller family, circa 1961. Back row, left to right: Janet, John, and Joseph. Front row: John H., Jimmy, Leon, and Ida. Courtesy of Joseph A. Miller

The Jonas C. and Catherine B. (Miller) Miller Family

by Leroy Miller

OUR FAMILY LEARNED TO KNOW

Yonas und Kettie (Jonas and Catherine) in late fall, 1943. I was six and in first grade that year. Because of my dad's (J. B. Miller) health problems, we had gone to Sarasota, Florida. We settled in Pinecraft—where else, for an Amish family from Ohio? Pinecraft then consisted of a half-dozen block-long streets with twenty-five to thirty small houses.

One of our first visitors was a white-bearded man who slightly resembled my Ohio grandpa, Mose Miller. It took my mom and the older gentleman a scant few minutes to determine, that indeed, he and Grandpa Mose were related—first cousins to be exact. That winter and the following winter, *Yonas*

und Kettie became our surrogate parents and grandparents.

The bond became even stronger after we moved here to southeast Virginia, in mid-November, 1945. The Millers and their nine married children and families took us in as one of their own. When the extended family had a “Miller gathering,” we were also included. More often than not, these events took place at the Jonas C. Swartzentruber home, where *Yonas und Kettie* lived in the Grandpa house.

The Swartzentruber farmstead was just south of Kempsville at the site of present Kempsville High School. With the whole tribe of Miller, Kauffman, and Swartzentruber children together, it was often quite a *gezevvel* (a constant



Left to right, circa 1957: Harvey J. Miller, Simon Coblentz, Jonas C. Miller, and Mrs. Alvin (Ruby) Colilenz. Courtesy of Leroy Miller



Mrs. J. C. (Catherine) Miller, circa 1954. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Miller

struggling or wriggling). The German uses one word, but I believe the two English words better describe the reality. We played noisy games of fire department through the barn with the ensilage carts and the litter (manure) carrier that ran along an overhead track. We disputed over whose turn it was on the gunnysack swing that hung from high in the driveway through the hay barn; there were arguments about who saw whom and where in “Motion Tag.”

While playing ball in the pasture several hundred yards from the house on one occasion, Daniel Swartzentruber cut his foot rather badly. Several of us ran to get help at the house. What I particularly remember was the run back to the field. I was eleven or twelve and a bit chubby. To my surprise, I could keep up with several of the dads, who were hampered by their own ample paunches. I considered my staying with the pack as quite an achievement. For

the first time ever I did something as well as a grown-up.

Despite the grumps and grunts, the happy times far outnumbered the less pleasant incidents. While there were planned-for gatherings at various holidays—Easter and Pentecost in particular—Sunday evenings often found a number of *Yonas und Ketti*’s adult children crowded into their small living-room. Since the Kempsville Church did not have Sunday evening services, that became a time for informal visiting. Children came and went as the older folks discussed points of Scripture, or who was related to whom. Now and again a youngster would find the conversation intriguing enough to hang around while an elder pronounced with certainty, “Well, that’s what it says, and I believe it,” or another reminisced, “Do you remember when we lived on the Lehman farm in Geauga [Ohio]?” When a question of kin could not be settled with *Yonas*’s word—he was an expert on family connections—he would bring out one or another of his genealogical books to confirm the truth.

The first members of the Jonas C. Miller family to arrive in the Kempsville Amish community were daughter Anna and son Valentine (Valley) in 1927. Valley hired out to Noah E. Yoder. Noah and his wife, Sadie, were childless and owned the farm that later became the Eli Swartzentruber farm on Overland Road. Swartzentruber sold the place in

the early 1950s for a housing development. Anna went to work for the Joe I. Hershbergers Sr. Mrs. Hershberger, Mary, was Anna's aunt.

Two years later, January 29, 1929, Jonas "J. C." and Catherine with their remaining eight children arrived in Virginia. They moved to a farm on then Holland Swamp Road—Euclid Road today. The farm was later owned by their son, Jonas, his wife, Kate, and family. Jonas sold the land except for the house and a couple side lots for development around 1960. Today, Kate, a widow, lives with daughter Betty in the two-story brick farmhouse they built in 1950. Another daughter, Alta Marie, also lives nearby.

Just less than a year after they arrived in Virginia, *Yonas und Kettie's* second son, Jake, died of pneumonia January 18, 1930, ten days short of his twenty-fourth birthday.

J. C.'s brother, Pete, and family also moved from Geauga County at the same time. While the church at

Kempsville was Old Order Amish then, some rules were not as strict as in Ohio. One was the matter of adjustable suspenders. Pete quickly made the switch to the store-bought variety, with evident satisfaction. His nephew, the late Harvey Miller, recalled, "One Sunday when we were together, Uncle Pete had on his new suspenders; he hooked his thumbs on 'em and said, *Ich vunner was der Harry Vever saaga daet veich dee shnollah galluss?*" ("I wonder what Harry Weaver would say about these adjustable suspenders?")

Petes left the Kempsville congregation in the mid-1930s and joined the Pentecostal Church. In the mid-1940s they lived on a farm on the east side of Kempsville Road, just south of present Providence Road. After selling the farm, they lived for many years on Clearfield Avenue near the present Gateway Baptist Church and school complex, off Virginia Beach Boulevard. Pete was a saintly, gentle-natured man, at times given to wry bits of humor. Both he and his wife, Anna, have gone on to Glory. He on March 27, 1970, and Anna, February 24, 1976. Their daughter, Ada, and husband, Joe Dowdy, still live on Woodstock Road, Virginia Beach.

Two more of J. C.'s brothers, Eli S. and Valentine D., known as "Pop," also moved from Ohio to the Kempsville community. Their stories are recounted in another section of this book.

The present Kempsville Mennonite (Beachy) congregation broke away from the Old Order group over horse and

J. C. and Catherine Miller's children, circa 1984. Left to right: John, Valentine, Jonas, Katie, Dan, Mary, and Harvey. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Miller



buggy versus automobile ownership in the late 1930s. Yonas was among the group who bought autos. Shortly after, son Harvey traveled to Geauga County, Ohio. One of the Miller family's former Amish acquaintances asked probing questions about changes taking place at "Norfolk," as the area was commonly called. "Well, does your dad have an automobile too?" asked the curious one. Harvey admitted that indeed, his dad had bought a car.

The questioner nodded knowingly and said, *Yah, vell, sellah Yonas hut noch immer der Automobile Geisht khat*. ("Yes well, that Jonas has always had the automobile spirit.")

While J. C. tried over the years to make a livelihood farming, he was a salesman at heart. Back in Ohio, he had supplemented family income by selling Heberling—similar to Watkins and Rawleigh—products from a horse-drawn wagon. A number of years after



moving to Virginia, he took a job at Yoder Dairies plant in Kempsville. During the last decades of his working life, J. C. was clerk in the dairy's retail sales office.

My last memories of J. C. center around the end of August 1958. By then, I had married one of his grand-

Valentine D. Miller family, circa 1956.
Left to right: Irene, Anna, Lydia, Elmer, Cora, Annie, and Valentine.
Courtesy of Irene Peachey



Abe and Irene (Miller) Peachey with baby Janet Miller, circa 1943. Courtesy of Joseph A. Miller

Valentine D. Miller's—later Abe Peachey's—farm, circa 1954, at the 4100 block on the west side of Holland Road across from Holland Meadows. Courtesy of Irene Peachey

daughters, Sarah, daughter of Valley and Sylvia Miller. We were living in Simon Hershberger's tenant house on Holland Road. Grandpas and other members of the extended family came to our home the evening of August 20, to celebrate Sarah's birthday. While there, J. C. told us he was scheduled to have gall bladder surgery the following week. Having suffered for many years with stomach problems, he seemed to be looking forward to the relief the operation promised.

Several days later, however, the news turned grim. J. C. was gravely ill after the operation, and the family was asked to come to Norfolk's Leigh Memorial Hospital on Mowbray Arch. I have never forgotten our visit the evening of August 27—the deep concern etched in Grandma Kettie's face and the sad resignation in her voice. "I'm afraid he won't live until morning."

Grandma's intuition was off just

slightly. About 4:00 a.m. the next morning, her husband of fifty-five years went Home to be with the Lord. She followed him June 4, 1969. Both are buried in the old Kempsville Church cemetery off Parliament Drive in Virginia Beach.

Gauged by modern measures, J. C. Miller and his wife, Catherine, were not "successful." They struggled most of their years to survive financially. At the end, there was little property or cash to leave with their posterity. However, their lifelong obedience to Christ has left a legacy more valuable than millions in cash or vast real estate holdings. A number of grandsons and great-grandsons are ordained ministers. In this last decade of the twentieth century, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren—dozens of families—live lives that testify to the Christian heritage left by their forbears, Jonas C. and Catherine Miller.

Elmer Miller family with grandparents, circa 1952. Left to right: Grandpa Valentine D., Grandma Annie, Mary, Elmer Sr., Elmer Jr., Annie holding baby Anna, Valentine, and Clara. Courtesy of Irene Peachey





Leroy Miller family, circa 1953. Left to right: Katie, Ruby, Bobby, Leroy, and Maynard. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Miller



Menno R. Miller, circa 1923. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Miller



Mrs. Levi (Mary Miller) Kauffman and daughter Laura, 1942. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Miller



Valentine E. Miller family, circa 1965. Standing, left to right: Olen, Raymond, Elvin, Sarah, Eli, Anna, Martha, Amos, and Valentine Jr. Seated: Valentine E., and Sylvia. Front: LaVern. Courtesy of Anna Miller



Valentine E. Miller farm, circa 1954, at the intersection of Rosemont Road and Bowcreek Boulevard where they lived from 1934 to 1960.
Courtesy of Sylvia Miller



Sylvia and Valentine E. Miller, circa 1981.
Courtesy of Anna Miller

A Summer's Eve Tragedy

by Leroy Miller

After a hot July day of threshing grain in 1949, the Valentine "Valley" E. Miller family set out from their Rosemont Road farm for an evening's respite along Chesapeake Bay. Unaware of the treacherous near-shore channel at Lynnhaven Inlet, the Millers entered the water several hundred feet east of present Duck-In. The two oldest boys, Ernest, sixteen, and Eli, fourteen, ran ahead of their dad and younger children. Mother, Sylvia remained in the car nursing two-month-old baby Raymond.

Quickly, the pleasant outing turned into a nightmarish scene the family would never forget. In one step, the two boys went from mid-thigh water to depths a foot or more over their heads.

Seeing the imminent danger, Valley, a competent swimmer, went to aid his sons, now struggling desperately. Unable to rescue both at once, Valley grabbed Eli who could not swim at all—Ernest had earlier learned to stay briefly afloat. Fighting a current that threatened to sweep them away, Valley managed to drag Eli to shore. All but exhausted, he turned to go back for Ernest, only to see an arm wave one last time before plunging from sight.

Help was quickly on the scene, but to no avail. Darkness fell and the search effort was called off until morning. Two days of dragging operations turned up nothing. The third morning, Joe I. Hershberger Sr. awakened early, left his Holland Road home and drove to the inlet to search along the shore. Shortly after daylight, Joe discovered Ernest's body caught in the railroad trestle that ran parallel to and inside the old Lesner Bridge across Lynnhaven Inlet. An incoming tide had apparently carried the body along the channel and under the highway bridge before it finally lodged in a trestle crosspiece.

A few days later, a large crowd gathered for the funeral at the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church. Ernest, a pleasant-natured young man, had joined the youth group less than a year earlier and was in the pre-baptismal class at the time of his death. All who knew him had witnessed the sincerity of his youthful Christian faith. Ernest had also been a junior member of Davis Corner Volunteer Fire Department, and several non-Amish members, including Chief John Marr, were present for the service. For the benefit of those who could not understand German, minister Jake Hershberger preached part of the funeral sermon in English—one of the first, if not the first, English messages in the Kempsville Church.

Ironical, it seems, that Joe I. Hershberger Sr. who found Ernest's body, should also die three years later as the result of an accident. After getting off a Greyhound bus in the early morning of November 1, 1952, Joe, seventy-three, was struck and killed by an auto at Gap, Pennsylvania. His funeral and burial took place at Kempsville, November 4, 1952, the day Dwight D. Eisenhower was elected to his first term as president of the United States.



Ernest Miller, circa 1948. Courtesy of Sylvia Miller

Joe I. and Mary (Miller) Hershberger Sr. Family

by Andrew J. Hershberger

AMISH-MENNONITE FAMILIES SETTLED in Princess Anne County for various reasons—the mild climate, inexpensive farmland, the nearby Norfolk City Market, and relatives already living there. While one or another of those factors may have played into the Joe I. Hershberger family's move in January 1922, to southeastern Virginia, they came primarily to escape Ohio's Bing Act.

Passed by the General Assembly, the law required all Ohio children under eighteen to attend a state certified school. Under certain conditions, a work permit could be obtained at age sixteen. Heavy fines and jail time were imposed on those who refused to comply. The law went into effect in

1921, and caused much dismay to Amish parents.

Our family was immediately caught up in the controversy. We were then living in Geauga County east of Cleveland. My two oldest brothers, Jonas, fifteen, and Jake, thirteen, had already completed the eighth grade. The new county school superintendent was determined to enforce the mandate to the letter; so, the two Hershberger boys faced several years of attendance at public high school—a policy the Amish church strongly resisted. Tensions ran high on both sides, with neither one inclined to yield ground. Dad was issued several warnings, then arrested and held overnight in the Chardon village jail.

Joe I. Hershberger Sr. raking hay in Holland Road field, circa 1933, near the present Holland Plaza. Courtesy of Andrew Hershberger



The situation had become intolerable for my parents, and they began actively planning to leave Ohio. Several years earlier, Dad (Joe I.) had traveled with several church brethren to a number of Southern states. Having gotten a favorable impression of the Amish community at Kempsville, Dad now contacted a cousin, Eli S. Miller, who was living there. Within a short time, we made arrangements to rent a farm from Fred Krahenbill, a mile-and-a-half east of Kempsville. The farm buildings were off Princess Anne Road near present Kempsville Meadows Elementary School.

Since plans were to leave Ohio by January 1, 1922, the Hersberger home bustled with activity. December was rapidly approaching. Getting ready for our dispersal sale brought mixed feelings. We seven children—five boys and two girls—had been born here. The place had a new barn, and Dads had talked about a new house. Here were many fond memories of family gatherings with aunts, uncles, and cousins. Leaving this pleasant spot for a strange community hundreds of miles away, did not seem very exciting.

Dad engaged Walter Andrews—famed as one of northern Ohio's best auctioneers—to handle our sale. Farmers came from near and far on auction day. The large crowd's good mood was further nourished by free bowls of oyster stew dipped from a large outdoor kettle. Farm equipment, horses, cattle, and miscellaneous items were sold at auction; however, the farm

did not sell until several years later when it was purchased by the Clevertons, two brothers, from Cleveland.

We loaded a railroad boxcar with household furnishings, along with everything else we intended to take along to Virginia. The canned goods—fruits and vegetables—were packed in barrels of oats to protect the glass jars from breaking. Shortly after New Year's, 1922, our family boarded a southbound passenger train. We stopped off briefly while enroute to visit Dad's brother, Noah, and family at Plain City, Ohio.

Arriving at Norfolk's Union Station on a mild, sunny day, we must have been a curious sight dressed in heavy winter overcoats. Joe Slabaugh, son of "Sep" Slabaugh, of Moyock, North Carolina, met us at the train station. Joe owned a car and worked for the Noah E. Yoders. He drove us to the Yoders where we learned plans to move into the rented house would be delayed by a week. As a result, our family separated into three groups to share the kind hospitality of Noah and Sadie Yoder, the Jake Stutzmans, and Eli S. Millers.

There were many adjustments, some difficult, as we settled into our new surroundings. We found the climate pleasant and the native people friendly; however, their Southern accent sometimes left us wondering what had been said. Having had no contact with persons of another race in Ohio, it took some time to feel at ease with our black neighbors. We children were frightened simply because they were different from what we had been accustomed to.



"Grandma," Mrs. Joe I. Hersberger, circa 1969. Courtesy of Andrew Hersberger

Our rented farm had little resemblance to what we had left in Ohio. The poor soil and shabby buildings left much to be desired. The house itself teemed with rats—upstairs, downstairs—we saw them as they scampered across the floor in broad daylight. At night they squealed and gnawed behind the walls and ceilings. Besides their large number, these rats were unique in that some were spotted white, apparently the result of white or albino animals crossing with the usually brown ones.

Chiggers, also called jiggers, were another plague new to us Northerners. The parasites would burrow under the skin, raising an itchy welt. Scratching gave temporary relief but brought more misery later with a siege of infected “Virginia” sores. We also contended with homesickness—the invisible “bug” that got into one’s heart, touching the emotions, with the effects far more lasting than a mere redbug bite.

Like many of the Kempsville Church folks, our parents also began attending Norfolk’s curbside market soon after we arrived in the area. Early

Saturday morning, Mom and Dad would set out on the ten-to-twelve-mile trek with horse-drawn market wagon, loaded with farm produce. The Kempsville Amish-Mennonites were noted for their scrapple, sausage, hominy, dressed poultry, eggs, milk, cream and butter, along with garden fruits and vegetables in season.

The Kempsville folks, several families from the Moyock, North Carolina Amish community, and Mennonites from the Fentress–Mt. Pleasant area of Norfolk County, converged on Brewer Street, to join other farmers and merchants from surrounding rural counties. Brewer Street became a beehive of activity as vendors of all descriptions set up shop curbside. Wagons and Model T Ford trucks lined the street for several blocks. The open-air market was usually profitable and proved a financial lifesaver for farm families caught in the 1930s Great Depression.

One Saturday that first spring, 1922, we had a near tragedy at home. Mom and Dad were away at market in Norfolk. We children were home alone. The four oldest, Jonas, Jake, Joe, and Elmer were outside playing ball. Little sisters, Fannie, three, and Katie, one, awakened, hungry for breakfast. As a confident six-year-old, I set about frying eggs for the girls. I had often watched Mother do it, so I wasn’t expecting any problems. Our kerosene cookstove was primed and preheated with gasoline. I set the can too near the burner and it quickly caught fire.

Joe I. Hershberger’s market wagon, circa 1936. Courtesy of C. H. “Curly” Byler





Sadie Miller (left) with Katie and Fannie Hershberger, circa 1935. Courtesy of Joseph J. Overholt

Grabbing it up, I spilled gas and scattered flames as I ran across the kitchen floor. The girls' and my screams quickly brought the older boys, who managed to smother the blaze with blankets. Even now, I shudder to think of what could have happened.

A more humorous incident occurred that same spring with Dad's first attempt at plowing with a tractor. Unlike the Geauga County Amish, who forbade the use of tractors for crop farming, the Kempsville Church allowed them; so Dad bought a Sampson tractor and plow. Trying out this strange new equipment became a family affair as we gathered to watch. The tractor came abreast, with the plow turning the ground nicely. We all waved happily as Dad waved back. The slight distraction and his inexperience were just enough cause for him to miss the turn at the end of the field. Despite

Dad's earnest shouts of "Whoa! Whoa!" the horseless machine ran headlong into the ditch.

Princess Anne County's secondary roads of that time were unimproved and poorly maintained. Only as funds were available would county officials hire a private owner-operator of a tractor and King Drag to level the dirt road surface. The road—Salem then, Princess Anne now—past our house was first gravelled in 1922. Only after the state took over the county system in the 1930s did the area's roads begin to show marked improvement.

The brothers, Noah E. and Milton Yoder were among those who contracted for road work. They owned a big Twentieth Century steam tractor, a machine that at least one elderly Princess Anne resident mistook for something else. As the smoke belching monster headed her way, she reportedly called out, "Look a yonder, chilrun. They's a big ole train engine comin' up the road."

On one occasion, Noah and Milton found themselves at odds with a prominent county judge. As their contract would take them past the judge's home, he asked to have his private lane graded on county time. Unwilling to compromise their integrity, Noah and Milton refused. Sometime later, Noah was called for jury duty. Asking to be exempted for religious reasons, Noah understood his request had been granted. The judge, however, had the last word by sentencing Noah to a week in jail for failing to

appear as requested. Noah was permitted to serve his time on weekends.

After a year on the Fred Krahenbill farm, my parents rented a farm owned by Noah E. Yoder. Known as the Jake Stutzman Farm, it was located along what is now Euclid Road. We lived there four years. Jonas Millers owned the farm last before selling most of the land for housing development and the Norfolk-Virginia Beach Expressway.

While there on the Stutzman place, Dad bought a tract of approximately 340 acres, and later 175 acres more, on

Holland Swamp Road—Holland Road today. The tract stretched along the north side of the road from what is now 3740 to 4380 Holland Road. Later Dad divided the land into three parcels—two which became farms for brothers Jake and Jonas. He farmed the third part with the help of us younger children until his retirement in 1941.

At that time, Dad offered brother Elmer and me a three-way partnership. He supplied the equipment, while we furnished the labor and split costs and proceeds 50-25-25 percent. That worked well for two years, however during the period Elmer and I both married—he, Sarah Bontrager and I, Lizzie Wengerd. Elmer and Sarah then bought a farm near Ross Gallup's store at Shipp's Corner and moved there at the end of 1942. Elmers later sold the property, part of which became Cardinal Estates mobile home park.

Dad and I continued the partnership another year, after which he sold the home place to me and Lizzie. He and Mother kept five acres for their Dawdy Haus (Grandparents' home) and



Joe I. Hersherberger bought this parcel of land in 1926. Seen here circa 1954, it is located at 3740 to 4830 Holland Road. Courtesy of Andrew Hersherberger

Elmer and Andrew Hersherberger holding a rattlesnake they killed while stacking peanut hay, circa 1933, at the present site of Holland Plaza Shopping Center. Courtesy of Andrew Hersherberger



farmette. Dad was killed in a traffic accident at Gap, Pennsylvania, in November 1952. Mother continued living there until June 1970, when she moved with us to Due West, South Carolina. Mother and Dad's five-acre plot is presently the site of Messiah Lutheran Church.

The Holland Swamp land was not a desirable tract in the beginning. For one thing, it was three or more miles from Kempsville—the center of the Amish community; and besides, there was good reason for the “Swamp” label. During heavy rains, the road and fields were like a shallow lake, under several inches to two or more feet of water.

Even the local native farmers were less than impressed with Dad's purchase. Years afterward, during the 1950s, Alf Newman of London Bridge, told Leroy Miller, “I used to ride up and down Holland Swamp Road in the mule cart with my Daddy. Daddy would say, ‘Mr. Hershberger's gonna end up in the po' house with that useless piece of land.’ But now it's as good farmland as you can find around here. The Mennonites showed us old Southerners how to farm.”

The change had come about by digging big drainage ditches with a dragline power shovel, and sound rules of farming Amish and Mennonites learned generations ago on submarginal land in Europe. Crushed limestone was applied to the sour land along with stable manure and commercial fertilizer. We also used crop rotation—unlike the old Southern practice of year after year

raising corn, tobacco, or cotton until the soil would no longer produce.

Since we needed to erect farm buildings, Dad bought a sawmill, moved it to Holland Swamp Road and began sawing logs. All the lumber for the barn and other outbuildings came from our woods. The farmhouse, however, was purchased as a kit from Gordon Van Tyne of Chicago. Everything in the package—precut lumber, plaster, and roofing—was of fine quality and cost all of \$3,900. The house, a two-story, had eight rooms, a bath, and several porches.

I have never forgotten the barn raising. Needing to get the 44-by-100-foot dairy and horse barn up as quickly as possible, Dad hired a noted barn builder from Geauga County, Ohio, along with several more carpenters. The loft-roof structure was made of laminated self-supporting ribs, preformed and made on site. The design was new for the work crew, boss carpenter included.

There was open contention the morning of the raising, as the crew bickered with the boss over how to get the heavy, unwieldy arches into place. The boss prevailed with his plan at the start, but little was accomplished through the forenoon. After lunch, the boss gave in to the crew's plan, which worked well. By quitting time the ribs had all been set.

That is not the end of the story. Tired from the long hard day and lulled by the balmy evening, the men decided they could wait until morning to brace

FAMILIES AT KEMPSVILLE IN 1922

Daniel Beachy
Joe I. Hershberger
Simon Hershberger
Pete Kinsinger
Noah Lee
Eli S. Miller
Joseph S. Overholt
Simon Schrock
Jake Stutzman
Christian Swartzentruber
Eli M. Yoder
Elias Yoder
Iddo Yoder
Lloyd W. Yoder
Milton E. Yoder
Noah E. Yoder
Noah W. Yoder
William S. Yoder

the superstructure. Imagine, waking the next morning to find the whole set of spans down, twisted and broken. During the night, a sudden storm had flattened the accomplishment of the previous day. Had the boss yielded to the advice of the other workmen, there would have been ample time to put in the bracing. Such are life's lessons, though often learned a bit too late.

THE RAILROAD'S IMPORTANCE

Before improved, hard-surface roads and the semi-truck, railroads were of primary importance for moving goods to market. Spur lines of the Norfolk and Southern Railroad ran like spider webs all across Princess Anne County. Though all three farms—Krahenbill, Stutzman, and Holland Swamp Road—were a couple miles apart, neither was less than a half-mile from one of these rail lines.

Trains held a special fascination for me. Unlike today's dull diesel engine, there was something unusual about a coal-powered steam locomotive, black smoke pouring from the stack and wheels clacking along the rails with a dozen cars in tow. Long after the engine noise had faded, one could mark the train's progress as the shrill whistle screamed a warning at some distant crossing.

One of the area's most important rail lines linked Munden Point with Euclid—along Southern Boulevard, just east of Witchduck Road—where the tracks joined the mainline between Norfolk and the oceanfront. The train

included eight or ten freight cars, a mail car, and passenger coach and made numerous stops along the way, to and from "down in the county."

Strawberries and potatoes were important cash crops at that time for farmers in southern Princess Anne County. By horse and wagon and Model T trucks they hauled their produce to loading stations along the tracks. Carloads of strawberries were iced at the ice plant in Pungo, ready for the big city markets in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York.

A near tragedy occurred on the railroad near our home in March of 1927, following a late winter snow-storm. During the peak of the storm, high winds ripped loose the overhead electric trolley cable along the Norfolk-oceanfront tracks. With the live wire down, the steel rails became charged with high voltage electricity.

We were living on the Stutzman farm then. Mom's nephew, Noah J. B. Miller had arrived some months earlier from Holmes County, Ohio, and had taken a job working at Rudy Yoders on Witchduck Road. The morning after the storm, Noah decided to pay our family a visit. Riding horseback, he would cross the tracks about a quarter-mile from our place. Unaware of the lethal force underfoot, Noah allowed the horse to step on the electrified rail. The horse went down instantly as Noah, unharmed, slid off the back of the dying animal. Needless to say, Noah was a shaken young man when he arrived at our door shortly afterward.

He Held His Place

by Leroy Miller

The day had begun like a thousand others in my years as a construction subcontractor. By mid-forenoon, though, September 14, 1965, would be etched into my memory as one of the most painful days of my life. Helper Titus Overholt, and I had arrived at the job site along Parliament Drive around 8:00 a.m. As we unloaded tools and set up for work, Titus remarked that his dad, Henry Overholt, along with John Henry Yoder and the brothers, Joe I. Jr. and Jacob "Jake" Hershberger, had left early that morning on a trip to Alabama. Plans were to look for rural farmland that could be bought by Amish-Mennonite families who were selling their Virginia Beach land.

About 9:15, my wife, Sarah, drove up. "There's been a serious accident," she said. "The men have been taken to the hospital in Franklin [Virginia]. The word is that Jake was killed."

Titus left immediately for home at Mears Corner, while I stumbled about in what seemed an incredibly bad dream. However, shortly afterward, a phone conversation with Jake's daughter-in-law, Rosa, confirmed the numbing reality: "Jake's gone. Henry and John Henry are critically hurt. Joe I. has some bruises." Rosa said.

"It just doesn't seem fair," I responded, my voice breaking with emotion. "It just doesn't seem fair."

The men were west of Holland, along Virginia Route 189, approximately a mile from its intersection with US 258. Joe I. was driving, Jake napped on the passenger's side, while Henry and John Henry were quiet and apparently dozing in the back seat. Two semitrailer trucks approached in the oncoming lane. Suddenly, a car behind the rear truck swung out to pass. The lead truck attempted to signal the auto back, but the driver ignored the warning. Joe I. pulled the steering wheel hard right and hit the brakes, to no avail. In an instant the cars ground together in a shattering crash.

Three days later at the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church, minister David Miller of Thomas, Oklahoma, spoke what many of the more than eight hundred persons at the funeral had felt at word of the fatal accident. "My first thought was, 'No! It can't be that God has called Home this man who was so very busy with His work.'"

Indeed, Jake, fifty-seven, had been a busy churchman the last dozen or so years of his life—minister and bishop at Kempsville, evangelist, and secretary-treasurer of Amish-Mennonite Aid, a position that had taken him numerous times to Germany and Central America, in behalf of Amish-Mennonite Aid's relief and missions' program. Since 1953, his weekly news and devotional column, "Lynnhaven Gleanings," had been a weekly feature in *The Sugarcreek [Ohio] Budget*.

While the wider Amish-Mennonite community lost a leader with Jake's death, much more, his beloved Matilda, "The only girl I ever dated," had lost her husband of thirty-six years. Their



A "gathering" at Jacob Hershbergers' home, 1958. Prior to 1970, black was the required color of all cars. Courtesy of Harold Overholt



Jacob and Matilda Hershberger, circa 1959. Courtesy of Edna Nisly

nine adult children had lost Dad; the grandchildren would grow up without Grandpa, and I, Leroy Miller, had lost a personal friend, who had influenced my growing-up years second only to my parents.

From age eight, I had relished his Sunday sermons, most of which included one or more illustrative anecdotes. With simple, descriptive words his stories would drive home a Biblical truth even a small boy could understand.

Jake had also been my sixth and seventh grade teacher from January 1949 through May 1950, at Kempsville Mennonite School. Though we lacked facilities and equipment that public schools consider absolutely essential, Jake's ability to improvise overcame some obstacles. In a simple demonstration with a lighted bulb and a small world globe, he taught us the cycle of the seasons and the basics of the solar system—a lesson I have never forgotten. Beyond that, Jake rein-

forced, by word and example in the classroom, the values we were learning from our parents at home: New Testament faith rooted in Jesus' teachings of compassionate love, honesty, and fairness.

Today as I remember Jake Hershberger, I call to mind several lines read at his funeral from Edwin Markham's poem, "Lincoln, the Man of the People."

*... He held his place—
Held the long purpose like a growing tree—
Held on through blame and faltered not at praise,
And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down
As when a kingly cedar green with boughs
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky.*

**Traveling in behalf of Amish-Mennonite Aid:
Jacob J. Hershberger, circa 1963. Courtesy of
Leroy Miller**





For almost half a century, Kempsville and its environs was home. The church on Parliament Drive; the farm on Holland Road; the Christian day school our eight children attended on Overland Road; the many friends and neighbors are all locked in our memories. Nevertheless, like my parents who left their Ohio homes in 1922, due to changing circumstances, by the early 1960s we too began to feel the nudging to move to a more rural area. Farming along Holland Road was becoming all but infeasible with the boom in housing and commercial development. In spite of that, I remember the feeling of guilt and betrayal of a trust that March morning when I phoned the buyer who had been pressing us to sell.

At that moment it was easy to forget the long miles of walking to and from school; the terrible roads of a bygone era; the land clearing; and digging of ditches by hand. While all of that might seem reason enough to prod one into moving on, life has taught me that difficult experiences somehow have a way of becoming most precious.

Elmer Hershberger enjoying his car, circa 1936. Courtesy of C. H. "Curly" Byler

Noah and Simon Hershberger, circa 1933, and Mary and Betty Gingerich, circa 1936. These two boys married these two girls. Courtesy of Simon Hershberger



Many Amish-Mennonite farmers enjoyed fishing in their spare time. Bishop Jake Hershberger is holding a nice flounder he caught, circa 1964. Courtesy of Jacob Hershberger Jr.



Jacob Hershberger farm at 3800
Holland Road, circa 1960. Courtesy
of Edna Nisly



Mrs. Jacob (Tillie) Hershberger with
several grandchildren, circa 1957. Courtesy
of Joseph Hershberger



Jonas and Katie Hershberger, circa
1963. Courtesy of Simon Hershberger



Joe and Sadie Hershberger, circa 1950.
Courtesy of Joseph Hershberger



Andrew and Elizabeth Hershberger, circa
1973. Courtesy of Mrs. Ellen Overholt

Yoder Dairies: An Experience in Sharing

by Leroy Miller

CHURCH, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY have long formed the triangle from which Mennonites and Amish have expressed their Christian faith; admittedly, that expression has often been less than perfect. However, with workaday activities put aside, a Sunday worship service is considered absolutely essential for the nurture of the spiritual person. While our interest in who is whose relative sometimes borders on the comical, the bond between parents, children, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins give security, and besides, fosters concern for needs other than one's own.

By virtue of these primary lines, the triangle is completed in community—the sense of belonging that comes in working within the larger group for the benefit of others. Traditionally, some of the more visible ways in which Amish and Mennonites have practiced community has been with barn and house raisings, ladies' sewings, and relief efforts following natural and man-made disasters both local and worldwide. In rare instances, a business enterprise has furthered and strengthened the concept of community. Yoder Dairies seems to have accomplished that for the Kempsville Amish-Mennonites.

Milk deliveryman Alvie Yoder, circa 1948. Courtesy Mrs. Henry Zook



Yoder Dairies was begun in 1929 as a partnership by Elmer M. Yoder and his brother, Eli. In my magazine article/ interview “Twelve Quarts on 1929” published in the April 1969 *Christian Living*, the late Elmer M. Yoder recalled its beginnings, “My brother Eli and I were selling milk to a distributor in town [Norfolk]. When we were notified our price would be cut from thirty-five to twenty-five cents a gallon, we figured we couldn’t sell milk for that price. So Eli and I decided to start a retail route.”

After obtaining a permit and encouragement from the Norfolk Health Department, Eli and Elmer were ready for business. They hired a delivery man, Pete (Peter D.) Miller, who had moved his family from Gauga County, Ohio, to Kempsville in early 1929. Having had some route

experience in Ohio, Pete made his first door-to-door delivery with twelve quarts of milk June 19, 1929.

Pete Miller, who died in March 1970, had shared his memories with me a decade earlier. His wages were to be 10 percent of gross sales. “My wages the first week came to \$1.92,” he recalled, chuckling, “But a dollar then went further than it does today.”

Business increased rapidly over the next few years, so that Pete’s pay topped \$35 weekly. Both Pete and Yoder’s Board of Directors concluded he was being overpaid. By mutual consent Pete’s wages were capped at \$35 a week.

In 1931, Eli and Elmer dissolved the partnership, drew up a charter and formed a co-op with several other Kempsville Amish dairymen. Major reasons for this new direction were

Yoder Dairies with “pickup” truck in front, circa 1945. Courtesy of Joseph A. Miller





Yoder Dairies' deliverymen, circa 1930. Left to right: Paul Zook, Pete Miller, and Norman Mast. Courtesy of Ada Dowdy



Melvin Kurtz standing behind the truck he used to pick up milk from farms, circa 1952. Courtesy of Joseph A. Miller

explained during conversations I had with A. J. (Andy) Hershberger of Donalds, South Carolina, and Menno J. Yoder of Chesapeake, Virginia, in 1995. "There was a lot of pressure on Elmer and Eli to begin pasteurizing milk," Menno said. "With the cost involved, they felt they couldn't handle it alone."

Andy Hershberger remembered, "At the time, a lot of our people were attending the Norfolk Market on Brewer Street. There were no restrictions. In fact, customers could buy dressed wild game. I remember seeing

bear meat somebody had brought from Moyock [North Carolina]. We sold [unpasteurized] cream, butter, and cottage cheese. Then, the health authorities told us we could no longer do that. Our people said, 'What will we do now?' Out of that came Yoder Dairies co-op."

Although the policy changed around 1960, for nearly thirty years only Kempsville Amish-Mennonite members could become producer-stockholders with Yoder Dairies. Andy and Menno both pointed to another aspect that set Yoder Dairies apart from most com-

mercial ventures. Stockholders mutually agreed to a limited number of dairy cows for each herd. Neither Andy nor Menno could recall the exact number, however, as I remember 1948–50, when my dad, J. B. Miller, was a Yoder's' stockholder, the stated figure was twenty cows. The reason for the policy was as Andy and Menno explained: "They wanted to leave room for any new producer who wanted to come in."

And come in they did. By 1952, approximately two dozen dairymen from the congregation were shipping

raw milk to Yoder's processing plant in Kempsville. After that, the number began to drop as migrations began, first to Montezuma, Georgia (1953–58); then Franklin, Kentucky (1966–67); and Abbeville, South Carolina (1970–71).

Today, 1995, none of the Kempsville Mennonite Church members own dairy cows. Raw milk is supplied by two producers: J. R. Lehman Jr. and Sons, and Wenger Farms, from the Mt. Pleasant area of Chesapeake. Like the earlier restriction for church members only, the 20-cow limit has long since been waived. The Lehmans milk 150 cows,

Yoder Dairies Sales office: Carol Miller and Jonas Miller, circa 1969. Courtesy of Leroy Miller





Yoder Dairies in later years, circa 1960. Courtesy of Leroy Miller

while Wengers' herd is around 70.

The decision by Yoder's stockholders to limit their own economic potential for the future benefit of others proved its merit during the 1930s. While Kempsville Amish farm families often struggled with financial hardship, none were forced into bankruptcy or foreclosure as the Great Depression brought economic ruin to millions across the United States.

Despite bylaws that excluded members outside the Kempsville congregation from becoming Yoder's stockholders, the restrictions did not apply for hiring employees. In fact, Yoder Dairies depended on non-Amish truck drivers from the beginning. The bottled milk was hauled to a distribution point in Norfolk, then loaded onto horse-drawn wagons for delivery to the customer's doorstep. After a few years,

Yoder's began buying its own delivery trucks, but individual church members were not permitted to own or drive an automobile (Elmer S. Yoder describes in chapter 11 some of the resulting controversy).

Norman "Sox" Mast and Paul Zook served as helper-drivers for Yoder's first delivery man, Pete Miller. Mast and Zook were from the Mt. Pleasant (Fentress) and Deep Creek Mennonite congregations in present-day Chesapeake. The two men were followed by a long line of fellows from those communities who delivered milk or worked in the processing plant. A partial list includes Philip E., Vernon, Ivan, Merlin R., and Francis Miller Jr.—Millers all; Reid Broadwater; James Dickerson; Jim Kurtz; and Joe Slabaugh.

Ivan Miller, who left in 1980, spent



thirty-five years at Yoder Dairies, fourteen as route manager. Francis Miller Jr. started as a route helper in 1946, and has been general manager since 1975.

Five members from the Providence (Conservative) Mennonite Church, Virginia Beach, are also longtime Yoder's plant and office employees: Elsie Miller, thirty-six years, and her brothers, Willard "Bill" and Lester, each have more than thirty. Betty Miller has worked in the office twenty-five years and her sister Alta Marie Krause, twenty-three.

Throughout its sixty-six years, Yoder Dairies has seen a number of changes as any business does over time. From a small beginning, it reached its peak during the 1950s and 1960s. Then,

Amish-Mennonite dairymen began leaving the area and supermarket milk sales cut into home delivery routes.

Yoder's scaled back its operations in the years since, but even today, nine delivery men serve five thousand wholesale and retail customers in Norfolk, Virginia Beach, and Chesapeake.

Limited space here prevents a Yoder Dairies' story told in great detail; however, one point is noteworthy: Today, profit and loss figures dictate, almost entirely, individual business and corporate decisions. By contrast, in the early 1930s during the Great Depression, a group of church brothers purposed to limit their own financial progress so as to offer a step up to fellow brothers on a lower economic rung.

Milk production was a primary source of income for many Amish-Mennonites. Here, circa 1958, cows are grazing in Will Overholt's pasture off present Parliament Drive in Virginia Beach. The Melvin L. Yoder farm is in the background. Courtesy of Henry Overholt

The Simon L. and Lydia E. (Yoder) Yoder Family

by Elmer S. Yoder

THE PROMISE OF A BRIGHTER FUTURE drew the Simon L. Yoder family to Princess Anne County, Virginia, in 1936. On a blustery February day, Simon L., thirty-four, his wife, Lydia, thirty-two, with their seven children, left their native Pennsylvania home, bound for the Kempsville Amish community. Mountainous Somerset County, still in the grip of the Great Depression, showed its reluctance for our family's leaving with a heavy snowfall across the area. As a result, the moving truck could get no closer than two miles from our farm.

Hardship, however, was nothing new for Mother and Father, and inclement weather would not deter them from their goal. A number of select dairy cows and several pieces of farm equipment were put onto horse-drawn sleds and dragged to the waiting truck. Father then accompanied the truck; a day or two later, we children and Mother Lydia rode with Uncle Eli L. Yoder in his car on the journey south over icy roads.

Arriving in Virginia, my parents moved onto the Lee farm which they had earlier arranged to rent from the

Simon L. Yoder's children, circa 1938. Left to right: Bertha, Thelma, Pauline, Anna, Dorothy, Galen, Elmer, and Denver. Courtesy of Elmer S. Yoder





owners, the Simon Schrock family. A mile east of Kempsville on Princess Anne Road, the farm buildings stood on the site of present-day Church of the Ascension Catholic Church. Towards Kempsville, the farmland bordered the Eli S. Miller farm, and on the side toward Princess Anne Courthouse, Simon Schrock's home farm adjoined ours.

My parents had gone through financial difficulties for several years before leaving Somerset County. Ten years after their marriage in 1922, they bought a farm just as the country was beginning to feel the effects of the

Depression. After two years' ownership, Simon and Lydia's financial condition had grown bleak. My father sought advice from his father, Lewis S. Yoder, who suggested they sell the farm and dispose of the livestock and equipment at public auction. In an attempt to improve their circumstances, my parents rented the Crist Zook farm; however, their best efforts availed little, and as 1935 waned they began making plans to move.

Shortly after their marriage in 1922, Mother and Father had spent nearly two months in southeastern Virginia. The area appealed for several reasons.

Former Simon L. Yoder farmhouse on the south side of Princess Anne Road just west of Edwin Drive in Virginia Beach, 1950. Courtesy of Elmer S. Yoder

Both had relatives there. Mother's Aunt Amelia (Mrs. Lloyd W. Yoder) and my father's Uncle William S. Yoder and Aunt Barbara (Mrs. Milton Yoder) all lived in the Kempsville Amish community. Another of Mother's aunts, Effie (Mrs. Earl Yoder), lived in the Deep Creek community, twenty miles south.

By June of 1927, the issue about the *Meidung*, which had been smoldering for years, broke into the open with a division of the Old Order Amish. About half the membership withdrew from Bishop Moses M. Beachy. In December 1927, Moses Beachy's congregation unanimously approved the ownership of automobiles. On November 11, 1928, my father, Simon, was ordained to the ministry at Flag Run Amish Church near Springs, Pennsylvania.

The "Beachy" label has caused confusion among some unfamiliar with the various Amish and Mennonite group. Particularly, in the Virginia Beach, Virginia area, "Beachy Church" can lead to wrong conclusions. Over the years, Leroy Miller has spoken with several persons who thought "Beachy Church" was somehow related to the local resort area.

With hopes for better economic times in the new community, our family did make one major adjustment, going back to horse and buggy after owning a car for six years. The advantages at Kempsville, however, outweighed what might have seemed an inconvenience at the time. Yoder Dairies, a cooperative owned by church-member dairy farmers, offered

Former Simon L. Yoder farm buildings south of Princess Anne Road just west of Edwin Drive in Virginia Beach, 1950. Courtesy of Elmer S. Yoder





good prices for Grade A milk. After two years, my father bought a WC Allis Chalmers tractor and began custom plowing and disking. Before 1940, he began a delivery route to Norfolk's Fox Hall and Norview sections. Driving the horse-drawn two-seated buggy, he found a waiting clientele for our poultry, pork, and other farm produce. In 1942, we bought the Simon Schrock home farm when Schrocks moved to Stuarts Draft, Virginia. With the purchase came a retail sales booth in the Norfolk City Market on Monticello Avenue. That gave us an outlet each Saturday for as many as 250 dressed broilers, sausage, and other pork products.

Slowly, finances began to improve for the Simon L. Yoder family, but years passed before Father finally reached the goal he had set upon leaving Somerset County. By 1949 he had paid the last creditor, principal and interest, for debts incurred in the 1930s.

Though horse and buggy was the local means of travel used by the Kempsville Amish when we arrived in 1936, pressure soon grew to allow church members to own automobiles. Growing traffic volume on country roads made horse-drawn buggies increasingly unsafe. Besides, while autos were forbidden for individuals, Yoder Dairies owned delivery trucks collec-

Denver and Emma (Peachey) Yoder family, circa 1960. Back row, left to right: Millard, Emma, Judith, Homer, Clifton, and Denver holding Loretta. Front row: Donald, Sharon, Ellen, and Denver Jr. Courtesy of Elmer S. Yoder

Ed. note: The Simon L. Yoder family's full story, Simon L. and Lydia E. Yoder: Twentieth Century Pilgrimage, is available from the author, Elmer S. Yoder, 1136 S. Prospect Ave., Hartville, Ohio 44632-8708, at \$12.00 per copy, plus postage.



Elmer S. and Esther (Yoder) Yoder's wedding on August 26, 1950. Courtesy of Elmer S. Yoder

tively. A significant number of church members, including Simon L. Yoder, felt the policy was somewhat inconsistent.

The controversy reached the point by 1940 where the opposing groups decided to go their separate ways. Bishop Simon Schrock and fellow-minister Eli M. Yoder remained with the Old Order horse-and-buggy group, while Simon L. Yoder joined with the auto group. The two congregations shared the Kempsville meeting house until 1942, when Simon Schrock and his followers, by then a minority, moved to Stuarts Draft in Shenandoah Valley.

Our former bishop, Moses Beachy,

came from Somerset, Pennsylvania, to help the fledgling congregation become established. Father, Simon, became the first minister of the new Beachy Church at Kempsville and served alone until Jacob J. (Jake) Hershberger was ordained November 11, 1941. The following June 19, Jacob's elder brother, Jonas, was ordained to the ministry and to the office of bishop on November 8, 1942. Later, minister Ezra Troyer and ordained deacon Jonas Swartzentruber would also serve with the Kempsville ministerial body.

For readers not familiar with Amish-Mennonites, church structure is strongly congregational. Ministers are

Jerry and Thelma (Yoder) Yoder family, circa 1958. Back row, left to right: David, Joyce, Thelma, and Jerry. Front row: Jerry Jr., Edward, Esther, Galen, and Simon. Courtesy of Elmer S. Yoder





Amanda (Swartzentruber) Yoder, Simon's second wife, and Simon L. Yoder saying goodbye to grandson Steve, circa 1983. Courtesy of Elmer S. Yoder

ordained from the laity, usually by lot, and serve without salary. Two or more may share preaching and other leadership responsibilities. A bishop is ordained from the ministerial body; his role is that of senior pastor or overseer, rather than one with absolute authority. He officiates at weddings, baptisms, and communion.

Father continued his ministerial duties at Kempsville until 1953, when he, Mother, and the children still at home—Pauline, Dorothy, Bertha Grace, Marilyn, and Gerald—moved to the new Amish-Mennonite community at Montezuma, in Macon County, Georgia. My brothers, Galen and Denver, with their families also moved at the same time. I, Elmer, had left Kempsville three years earlier in 1950,

for a new home at Hartville, Ohio, in Stark County. There I married Esther Yoder and assumed the position of principal/teacher at Lake Center Christian School.

Today, at this writing in 1995, only two members of the Simon L. Yoder family still live at Montezuma, Georgia: sisters Bertha Grace and Pauline and her husband Allen E. Yoder and family. My remaining sisters and brothers and their spouses are Thelma and Jerry Yoder at Dublin, Georgia; Anna and Henry Hershberger at Belton, South Carolina; Marilyn and William S. Yoder at LaRussel, Missouri; Denver Yoder at Pelki, Mississippi (Denver's wife, Emma, died March 13, 1991); Galen and Frieda Yoder at San Vito, Costa Rica; and Gerald and Mary



Yoder at Paraste, Costa Rica. Sister Dorothy Arlene, single, died April 15, 1990.

Both parents have also gone to their reward. Mother on May 9, 1969, and Father on December 31, 1993. Based on the verbal testimony of many people, Simon L. Yoder's sixty-five years commitment to the Christian ministry in the Amish-Mennonite Church has left its impact. Today his four sons, and

ten of his grandsons are ordained ministers, and three granddaughters are married to ministers.

In their lifetime Simon and Lydia moved from Pa. to Va. to Ga. While two-letter abbreviation may adequately describe our earthly moves, the great, final move, Home to Glory with the Lord forever, is all but indescribable in human terms.

Mrs. Lydia E. Yoder, 1965. Courtesy of Elmer S. Yoder

The Joseph S. and Hannah (Wagler) Overholt Family

by Joseph J. Overholt

WE WERE LIVING IN THE OLD ORDER Amish community at Moyock, North Carolina, in 1936, when Dad was diagnosed with a spinal cancer. As a result of the grim news, our family moved twenty-odd miles northwest into Virginia, where my older brother, Will, owned a small place near Stumpy Lake in old Princess Anne County. The move put us nearer to friends and relatives in the Kempsville Amish community.

Our family was well acquainted with the area, as we had first settled in Virginia seventeen years earlier upon leaving Hartville, Ohio, in December 1919. At the time, my twin brother, John, and I were eighteen months old. Early on, our family had found the Kempsville Amish a warm and friendly people.

Left to right: John and Joseph J. Overholt, Andrew Hershberger, and Steve Miller, circa 1935. Courtesy of Joseph J. Overholt



We first lived in a house with boarded-up windows; however, by spring 1920, we moved to Mr. McClean's farm near Norfolk's city waterworks. Mr. McClean raised strawberries and hired black neighbors as pickers. Over time, we developed a rapport with these neighbors, several who became customers for our sour milk "clabber" at five cents per quart. Brother John and I became fast friends with little Matt who learned to speak our Pennsylvania Dutch dialect, an achievement that set Matt a class apart—a black "Dutchman" in Tidewater Virginia! Those early cross-cultural relationships stood us in good stead many years later, when John and I worked in street evangelism in New York City.

Our home at Stumpy Lake was on the side opposite of Indian River Road from the lake, near the present entrance to Stumpy Lake Golf Course. The J. Elmer Yoder family lived there last before moving to Aroda, Virginia, during the 1960s.

Though our time by the lake lasted only two years, pleasant times there, mingled with pain, stand out in my memory. We boys particularly enjoyed fishing and bullfrogging in the lake's waters. While on a visit, even Grandmother Mary Miller joined us in catching catfish at the spillway on



House near Stumpy Lake Golf Course, 1961, where the Overholts lived. Courtesy of Clifford Yoder

Elbow Road. We bullfrogged at night, which made the numerous stumps even more hazardous. On one occasion, an underwater snag caught the boat, stopping it suddenly and dumping us overboard. Usually caught by hand, the bullfrogs were kept in a wire pen and fed caterpillars until ready for market. Dressed bullfrogs brought twenty-five cents each at Norfolk City Market.

My fondness for coon hunting led to a scary incident one night as I set out with Bluetick Ben and the other dogs. Suddenly, the woods came alive with uniformed men. "Where's the still?" a voice barked, as several shotguns were aimed at me. After a bit, the revenuers determined they had the wrong man and released me. However, continuing their search, they found the moonshine still and arrested our nearby neighbor.

In early June 1937, Dad had a spinal tumor removed during four-hour surgery at a Norfolk hospital. Though he stood the operation well, there was no real recovery. Throughout the summer, his condition continued to deteriorate.

Relatives came from distant places to visit, and the local Kempsville Church people stopped by to lend support. Mother lovingly did her best to ease the pain and skin sores that came from lying in bed. Sister Delilah also helped with his care and took on the weekly responsibilities of getting our pork products to market in Norfolk.

With death approaching, Dad's thoughts centered more and more on spiritual matters. He was blessed by having the Bible and Christian literature read to him. As a boy, he and his father had shared in a special visitation with Jesus Christ in which the Lord appeared with eyes as a flame of fire.



Stumpy Lake spillway, where Joe liked to fish, on Elbow and Indian River Roads, circa 1945. Courtesy of Joseph J. Overholt

Now, during his last months on earth, that experience became a cleansing and refining process. Dad was particularly burdened for those he was leaving.

Among his last words were, *Mir misse besser tu, oder mir komme net anne* ("We must do better, or we won't arrive there"). By the hour, he would repeat, *Ewige Ruh! Ewige Ruh!* ("Eternal rest! Eternal rest!").



Joe's friends, Elmer and Andy Hershberger, with some raccoons they caught, circa 1932. Courtesy of Joseph J. Overholt

Dad lapsed into a coma shortly before his death in the early morning of November 24, 1937. Except for Lena and Catharine, my older brothers and sisters were all there. We stood around the bed while life slowly ebbed away. Brother Will read Psalm 90. As nineteen-year-olds, John and I found parting from Dad especially painful. The train of Amish buggies a couple days later seemed to add to our sorrow as the long black line moved along Indian River Road and on toward the funeral service at the Kempsville Amish Church.

The year following our father's death, we boys moved with Mother back to the farm at Hartville, Ohio. There, John and I, convicted by God's Word and the Holy Spirit, received Christ as Savior and Lord.

I returned briefly to the Kempsville area in 1941 and took a job as office clerk at Yoder Dairies for a year or two, before moving on. Over the next two

decades, brother John and I returned occasionally to visit our brother Henry's and Will's families. We also had first cousins, Abner, Fred, Joe, and Frank living in the Kempsville community.

Certainly, our most significant return came in the spring of 1959, when brother John set up his big tent on the Alec Brown farm south of Wood's Corner. Though not officially sponsored by the Kempsville Amish Mennonite Church, the members there, along with the Providence, Mt. Pleasant, and Deep Creek Mennonite congregations, lent active support to the several-weeks-long evangelistic meetings. Hundreds came nightly for the Gospel singing and preaching. Numerous persons, convicted by the Holy Spirit, made first-time decisions to follow Christ, while others were prompted to a fuller commitment to the Christian life.



John H. Miller, Delilah Overholt, and Joseph J. Overholt, circa 1936. Courtesy of Joseph J. Overholt



John Overholt's revival tent, 1959. Courtesy of Clifford Yoder

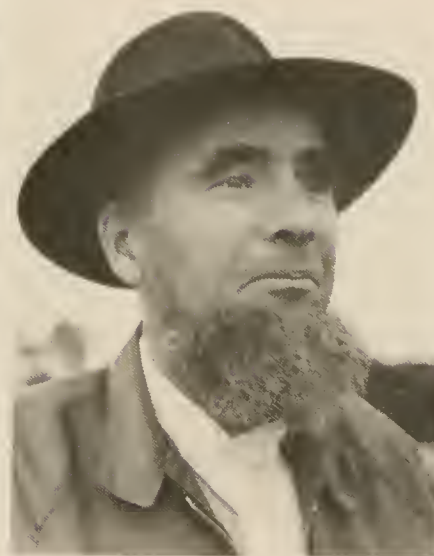
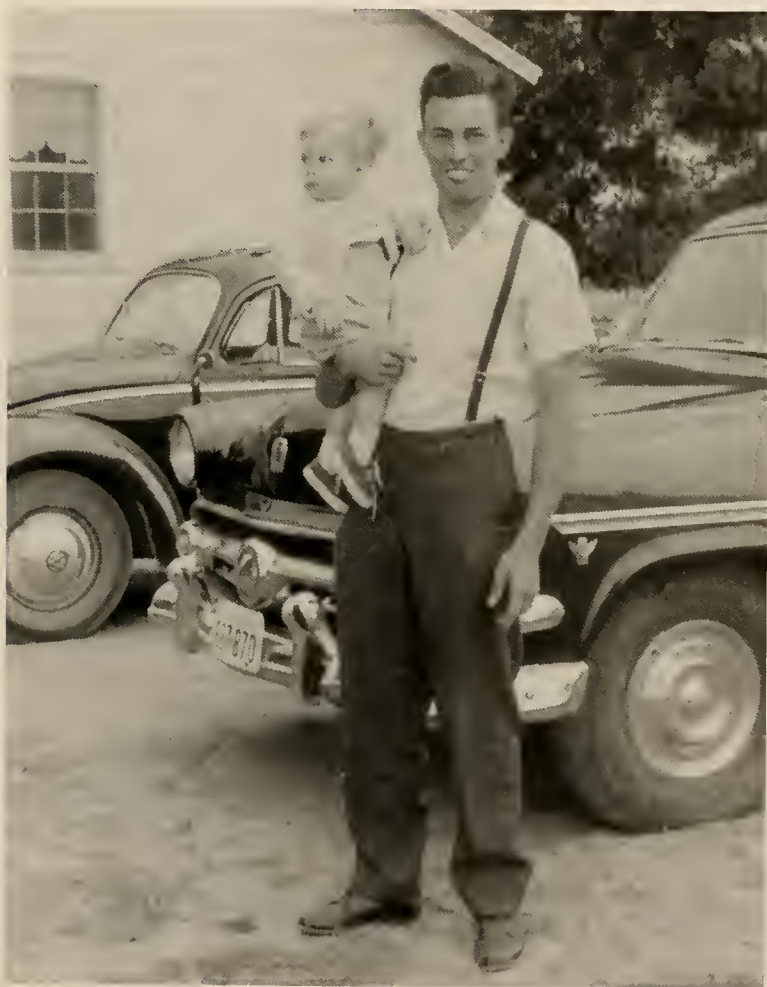
"I love my candy," Mary Overholt, circa 1953. Courtesy of Leon Zook



Ruth (Overholt) Hershberger holding Lila Yoder, 1958. Courtesy of Naomi Yoder



Left to right: Paul, Titus, Naomi, and Lewis Overholt, 1959. Courtesy of Harold Overholt



Henry J. Overholt, circa 1964. Courtesy of Mary Zook

Harold Overholt holding Phillip Hershberger, 1959. Courtesy of Mary Zook



Grandma Overholt and grandchildren, 1973. Left to right: Lois Hershberger, Mary Lou Hershberger, Amanda (Stutzman) Overholt, and Jonathan Zook. Courtesy of Mary Zook



Former Henry Overholt residence on Indian River Road near Acredale, circa 1960. Courtesy of Harold Overholt

Site of Henry Overholt residence, 5232 Indian River Road, in 1995. Courtesy of Leon R. Zook



Harvey and Fannie (Hershberger) Byler Family

by Katie (Byler) Yoder

LIKE NUMEROUS OTHER AMISH-Mennonite families who moved to the Kempsville area, our family already had relatives living there: Mother Fannie's sister, Sarah, the John B. Yoders and their brother, Joe I. Hershberger Sr. Uncle Joe's family had moved to Virginia in 1922. Fifteen years later, in 1937, we too—Mom, Dad, my brother Clarence ("Curly"), my younger sister Verna, and I—left our native Geauga County, Ohio, for a new home in Virginia. Dad, had not been well, and Uncle Joe offered to help us get established.

Initially, we moved into a house at Powell's Corner, where Bonney and Holland Roads intersected. The house, later turned into a store, was operated by Cornell Freeman, before being razed during the early 1950s. We lived only a year or so at Powell's Corner, before moving to the Beech Grove property at the north end of Yoder Lane, where sister Verna's family, the Henry Yoders, lived last before moving to Abbeville, South Carolina, in 1969.

Though I was nineteen years old, I had not dreaded the move to Virginia, having spent part of the previous year,

Harvey Byler family, circa 1980. Left to right: Mrs. Verna (Byler) Yoder, Mrs. Katie (Byler) Yoder, mother Fannie Byler, and C. H. "Curly" Byler. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie (Byler) Yoder



1936, working there for Aunt Sarah and her family. During that time, I learned to know the church young people, and in particular, one young man, Melvin L. Yoder, with whom I had several dates. Melvin didn't allow me to get lonely upon our permanent arrival at Kempsville in 1937. The first weekend, December 12, 1937, he took me home after Levi Beiler and Lydia Miller's Sunday evening wedding supper.

After moving to Beech Grove, Melvin's family, the Lloyd W. Yoders, became our near neighbors. Melvin and I continued to date until our marriage, December 17, 1940. We celebrated our fifty-fourth wedding anniversary this past year.

Early on, our family began attending Norfolk's downtown Brewer Street market. With Uncle Joe's help, we obtained a horse-drawn market wagon, onto which we loaded our poultry and dairy products, cooked hominy, and Mother's homemade chicken and potato salads. Mother introduced a new—for Norfolk—poultry marketing concept. Until then, fryers had always been sold whole. Mom began cutting them into parts: legs, breasts, wings, necks and backs, placing them on trays displayed in a glass-front showcase. The choice parts, of course, brought higher prices than the less desirable ones, but at the same time allowed customers with less means to buy chicken. The idea caught on quickly, and soon most merchants were offering chicken cut up, ready for the pan.

In 1942 Melvin and I bought the Pete Kinsinger farm when Pete and his wife, Sara, decided to quit farming. The Kinsingers moved across the road onto what had once been the Ben K. Smoker place. Pete and Sara lived there only a year or two before moving to Stuarts Draft, Virginia. Most recently, the Menno L. Yoder and Isaac Plank families had lived there. The

Clarence ("Curly") Byler. "Guess why they call me Curly?" Courtesy of C. H. "Curly" Byler





"Curly" Byler, circa 1940. The Lloyd W. Yoder farm is in the background. The Point O' View Elementary School is now on the site. Courtesy of C. H. "Curly" Byler

Kempsville Church of Christ presently occupies the site.

Our farm buildings were directly across Parliament Drive from the entrance to Yoder Lane. That put us close to both sets of parents: mine, a scant quarter-mile in Yoder Lane, and Melvin's across the road and a couple hundred yards to the northeast.

We had been there less than two years, when in April 1944, a lightning bolt struck the house. The strike occurred during an evening storm and at the time there was no indication of fire. However, around midnight, a gentleman driving by saw the flames and roused us from sleep. There was no fire department to call, and the house was quickly engulfed. We and the hired girl, Frieda Yoder, and our children, Raymond, two, and Verna, one, escaped with our night clothes.

The only item saved was a double-

tub washing machine and a few jars of canned goods. Melvin's sister, Elva, and Frieda Yoder carried the washer up several steps from the basement and out onto the lawn. The day following, the girls were unable to budge the heavy machine.

People immediately responded to our loss. Ladies from church came the next day to sew new clothes for us; the men came to clean up the mess left by the fire. Uncle Joe I. Hershberger and Melvin's dad, Lloyd W. Yoder, put in the foundation for a new house. We lived in the garage while the house was being built. It took eight months, but soon after Christmas, 1944, we had a nice, new three-story house. By then, our family had grown to five, son Allen having been born in November.

We lived there twelve more years before selling the farm for part of the Huntington subdivision and moving to



Left to right, circa 1939: Henry Yoder, unidentified, unidentified, and Verna Byler. Courtesy of C. H. "Curly" Byler

Montezuma, Georgia, in the spring of 1956. While the farm buildings were being constructed, we lived with our six children in a mobile home. In June, I returned to Virginia for several weeks for the birth of Harley, our youngest son. The last of our eight children, Fannie Carol, was born here in Georgia in 1957.

Looking back, we have fond memories of our years at Kempsville. I particularly recall from the very beginning the special bond I felt with the church's fifty or so young people—something I had not experienced back in Geauga County, Ohio. The ties with our extended family and the church community became even stronger as time passed. The decision to leave Virginia was not without some difficulty, although the move to Georgia was made easier because numerous

Kempsville families, including our relatives, were already living at Montezuma.

Life brings difficult experiences to every family, and we have had our share. Raymond, 23, our oldest, died in a plane crash January 13, 1965, while stationed as a noncombatant with the United States Air Force at Mannheim, Germany.

During the eleven painful days between Raymond's death and burial here at Montezuma, I felt God's wonderful presence surrounding me in a way I had never before experienced. Not only was I comforted then, but I believe God was also preparing me for future sorrows that would come to our family.

Later that same year, 1965, my dad, Harvey, had a fatal heart attack at the bank here in Montezuma. On

September 9, 1967, in the evening after Billy and Barbara Stoll's wedding, Melvin Jr., twenty-one, died in an auto accident on a rain-slick highway in Stark County, Ohio.

More recently, October 6, 1991, our second oldest son, Allen, forty-seven, died four hours after being attacked by the farm bull. He and his wife, Emma, were just two months short of celebrating their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary.

The Lord willing, Melvin and I will celebrate our fifty-fifth wedding anniversary later this year, 1995. For the past two years, we have struggled with Melvin's health problems, which

included a light stroke, Parkinson's disease, and progressive supranuclear palsy. Since November 1993, he must be fed six times daily with the aid of a feeding tube. We are happy, nevertheless. He improved enough that we were able to travel to Sarasota, Florida, in February and, during the spring, he mowed the lawn with the riding mower.

Though life's dark days sometimes threaten to overshadow the bright, our family finds comfort in the Psalmist's words: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble." (Psalm 46:1)

Melvin Yoder farm, circa 1958, currently on South Parliament Drive and Herndon Road. Courtesy of Mrs. Melvin L. Yoder

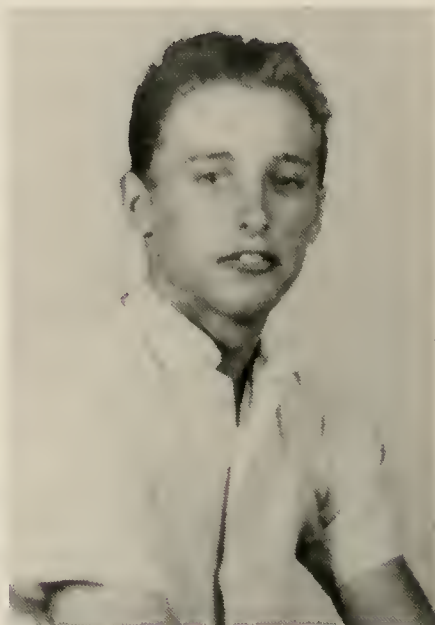




Raymond Yoder, circa 1964. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Yoder



Harvey Byler, circa 1952. Courtesy of Lloyd Swartzentruber



Melvin Yoder Jr., circa 1960. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Yoder

Allen Yoder, as usual, visiting with several of his countless friends, circa 1989. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Yoder



The Simeon and Magdalena (Stoll) Overholt Family

by Abner Overholt

WE HAD LIVED NEAR HARTVILLE, OHIO, and attended the King Amish Church about seventeen years when Dad's brother, my Uncle Joe, moved his family in 1932, first to Moyock, North Carolina, and some years later to Kempsville, Virginia. Uncle Joe's married son, Will, had also moved south, and on his visits back to Ohio, he had a lot of nice things to say about Virginia—the mild climate, the good fishing, along with other advantages of Southern living.

Dad, known for his "itching foot," and having some real health problems, didn't take long deciding to move to Virginia. Mom was less excited about the prospect, since our family had already moved around a number of times. However, with a bit of persuasion, Mom agreed with Dad's decision.

Until we could buy our own place,

Cousin Will told us we could move onto the farm he was renting from Mr. Blake in the Norview section of old Norfolk County. So, sight unseen, we packed our things and set out for Virginia. Leaving Ohio, the weather was snowy and the roads icy, but we consoled ourselves thinking about the balmy climate we would soon be enjoying. We were in for a major surprise—several, in fact. Tidewater lay under a foot of snow! Our house was a shack in a barnyard at the end of a mile-long lane. At night, the floor heaved up and down as the pigs rubbed their backs against its underside.

Shortly after our arrival, Willie Miller, who was working for Mr. Blake, took me along to the Eli S. Miller home one evening. Though a stranger, I was warmly greeted by the Millers. They urged me to come back the

Simeon Overholt family, circa 1980. Left to right: Leroy, Victor, Abner, Joseph, John, Fannie, Jerome, Fred, Ben, and Frank. Courtesy of Joseph Hershberger





Abner Overholt, circa 1932. Courtesy of Joseph J. Overholt

following Sunday, which I did. In the afternoon we went to the Joe I. Hershberger home where I learned to know several more of the Kempsville Amish young people.

Another Sunday soon after stands out particularly in my memory. The unmarried young people had all been invited to the Sol and Cora Yoder home for after-church dinner. I got to sit at the first table. While we were eating, the remaining young people were in the living room singing from the Mennonite *Church and Sunday School Hymnal*. The four-part harmony was new to me. I was so impressed and recall wondering if the beautiful harmony could be a foretaste of heaven.

The custom in the late 1930s and early 1940s was for the entire youth group to be invited to a single family's home for Sunday dinner. Buffet dining had not yet been introduced and food was always served around tables, sit-down style. Since seating was limited to

no more than sixteen at once, a large crowd often required two or three seatings. After the first group had eaten, the table would be cleared, dishes washed and reset, food bowls refilled for the next group. Understandably, Sunday dinner sometimes became a long-drawn affair; however, no one seemed to mind as we were there for the afternoon.

By five o'clock, the fellows would hitch up the horses and head home for evening chores. Sometimes we'd gather in the evening for a singing, or if none was planned, we might visit with neighbors or stay home.

Our family lived on the Blake farm in Norfolk County, only a short time before moving to a house along Indian River Road across from Stumpy Lake. We enjoyed living there. We boys could fish in the lake and the drive to church was only five miles—two or three less than we had with horse and buggy from the Blake farm.

As we needed more room, Pa bought a house near the Campostella dry docks. We tore down the building, hauled the lumber home, and added several rooms to the house at Stumpy lake. Working on the demolition along Norfolk's waterfront was an unforgettable experience. The large ships being repaired in dry dock, as well as those steaming along the Elizabeth River, were sights new to us Midwesterners.

Pa and I set out one morning to work in the house. Much to our surprise, we met the Ed Hochstetler family, all dressed in their Sunday best. We stopped and they asked where we were headed. "To work," we replied.

They laughed and called out, "Well we are on the way to church, since it's

Sunday." To our dismay, we had mistakenly thought the day to be Saturday! Quickly turning around, we hurried home. There, the rest of the family dropped what they were doing and we all got ready for church. Though we arrived late, we didn't miss the service altogether. Ed's boys, Jake and Ora, considered it a huge joke and had a great laugh at our expense.

My parents bought the Ethridge farm at Mears Corner. We were living there when Father died of cancer in 1938. Mother then sold the place to Ben Troyers and moved back to Hartville, Ohio. At one time or another, all of our family except brother John lived in the Kempsville area.

My brother Joe's family moved to

**The Ed Hochstetler home now at
1676 Kempsville Road. Courtesy of
Leon R. Zook**



A Christmas Sorrow

by Leon R. Zook

Christmas joy quickly faded the afternoon of December 25, 1955, when a pickup truck ride turned fatal. It all began innocently enough. The Joe Mast and Joe Overholt families were with Yost and Amelia Zook and their children for Christmas dinner. The Zooks were living on the Lloyd W. Yoder farm off Parliament Drive. After lunch, Elmo Overholt, thirteen, and Jerome Mast, fourteen, decided to visit their friend, Raymond Yoder, also thirteen and the oldest of Katie and Melvin L. Yoder's children. Melvin's farm was less than a quarter-mile west along Parliament Drive.

Though too young for a driver's license, Raymond had learned to drive around the private farm lanes. The three boys climbed into the pickup, with Raymond behind the wheel. Adjacent to the Yoder's land several unpaved roads crisscrossed Carolanne Farms. The boys turned into one of these dirt tracks. Speed picked up easily along a three-fourths-mile straightaway. However, too soon the road bent left ninety degrees. Going into the turn at an estimated fifty miles per hour, the truck rolled onto its right side.

Jerome and Raymond were relatively unhurt and managed to climb out of the cab. Elmo, though, had been far less fortunate. Whether the door unlatched as the truck went out of control or Elmo had attempted to jump free no one would ever know, but the young teenager was now pinned between the door and the upper truck frame, with the full weight across his torso. That Elmo was in grave danger, his companions recognized at once. Lifting with all the strength they could muster, Raymond and Jerome were unable to budge the truck. There was nothing left to do but to go for help. Still conscious, Elmo begged, "Please, hurry. It hurts terribly."

Hurry they did, but in vain. Before adult rescuers could arrive, the overturned truck had crushed out Elmo's life. News of the fatal accident quickly reached the Yost Zook home without naming the victim. In the emotional moments that followed, Mary Ann Overholt spoke sadly with a mother's intuition, *Ich hab en eidee es iss der Elmo* ("I think it's Elmo"). As indeed it was.

At the funeral several days later, one of Elmo Overholt's favorite Bible verses was quoted: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and staff they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4.) Elmo, a quiet, conscientious lad, may have had a child's premonition of approaching death and found comfort in the Scriptural promise.

Elmo Overholt, in front, circa 1954.

Courtesy of Mrs. Joe M. Overholt





Arlene Overholt, circa 1959, in front of farm buildings on Centerville Turnpike on the Virginia Beach side of the Chesapeake/Virginia Beach line. Courtesy of Mrs. Joe M. Overholt

Virginia, after Mom had gone back to Ohio. They settled on a farm along Centerville Turnpike near the Princess Anne–Norfolk County line. On Christmas Day 1955, Joe’s son Elmo, thirteen, was killed while riding in a pickup with Jerome Mast and Raymond Yoder. The truck overturned on a gravel lane on the Carolanne Farms horse farm. Elmo was pinned underneath and died before Raymond and Jerome, unhurt, could bring help to lift the truck.

Life in southeastern Virginia was different from what we had known in the Midwest. A couple sounds I remember particularly from that long-ago time. Damp, cloudy weather brought on the low, mournful growl of foghorns, warning ships away from shallow water. On wind-still evenings

the faint boom of a cannon on Portsmouth’s waterfront pronounced the nine o’clock curfew. The timing was so exact that we could set our watches by the big gun’s blast.

I suppose the biggest culture shock for me and my brothers was the stricter dress code in the Kempsville Church than we had been used to in the Amish Church in Ohio. The four-inch, and more, broad-brimmed hats, collarless and pocketless shirts took some getting used to. Bill Stoll, a cousin, who had moved to Virginia with us, became disenchanted—for good reason—with the required hooks and eyes on coats. One day while throwing hay bales out of the loft, a bale twine snagged a hook on his denim work jacket, dragging Bill along to the ground below.

Getting acquainted with black neighbors was also a new experience for us. Back in rural Ohio, we rarely met persons of another race. Here, they lived close by, and many of the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite farmers had black hired hands. In fact, their daily presence had one effect on our culture that we likely didn’t recognize at the time. Most of us felt speaking Pennsylvania-German was discourteous in the presence of those who did not understand “Dutch.” As a result, English became more quickly the everyday language in the Kempsville community, than it had in the larger Amish-Mennonite communities across the United States.

At first, Mom thought it was strange that black women waited until Saturday

to do their laundry. Mom and most of her acquaintances did laundry on Monday. The reason for the difference was obvious: Saturday was the only day the black ladies had for washing clothes. The majority worked as field hands. Monday through Friday they toiled at their backbreaking tasks; picking strawberries in season; tending collards, kale, and spinach, weeding and thinning—"spooning" as they called it—the plants with short-handled tools. In my mind's eye I see them yet, laughing and calling to one another midst the long raised-bed rows on the Oliver and Hudgins farms.

The pinch of the 1930s Great Depression was felt all across the United States, including Tidewater Virginia, as the following stories illustrate.

One of Cousin Will's neighbors had gone one day by bus to Norfolk. About the time the neighbor, Jake, was ready to return home, he met Will. Asking Will and getting consent to ride along home, Jake climbed aboard. As they passed a newsstand, Will stopped and asked Jake to run in for a newspaper while he stayed with the vehicle. The neighbor returned and wordlessly handed Will the paper.

Arriving home, Jake asked, "How much do I owe you for the ride?"

"Nothing at all," came Will's reply.

The transaction wasn't quite over as the neighbor hesitated momentarily. "Well, say, how about the dime you owe me for the paper?"

Will gave him the dime without

pointing out they had driven a bit out of the way to drop Jake off at his home.

An incident that involved a bit more money occurred about 1934. The single fellows from the Kempsville Church were playing an afternoon baseball game. A fouled or misthrown ball hit a spectator, Cora Hochstetler, squarely in the mouth, knocking out four front teeth. Cora, in Virginia for an extended visit was working for Mrs. Enos W. Yoder at the time. Dental work was relatively inexpensive then; however, Cora's parents in Indiana felt the ballplayers should be held responsible for the damage. So, the fellows each shelled out four dollars to pay for their daughter's bridgework.

I have many fond memories of the twenty-six years of living in old Princess Anne County, Virginia. My wife, Fannie, our children, and I moved from there in 1966. After twenty-eight years here in west-central Kentucky, I find myself half longing with the song writer for someone to:

*Carry me back to old Virginny,
There's where the cotton and the corn and
taters grow.
There's where the birds warble sweet in
the springtime
There's where this old heart is longin'
to go.*



Abner and Fannie (Hershberger) Overholt, circa 1993. Courtesy of Abner Overholt



Mary Ann (Hershberger) and Joe Overholt, circa 1970. Courtesy of Mrs. Joe M. Overholt



Lilly Overholt (1944–1962), daughter of Joe and Mary Ann (Hershberger) Overholt, circa 1961. Courtesy of Naomi Yoder

Irvin and Mary (Lee) Weaver Family

by Edwin Weaver

THE IRVIN WEAVERS LEFT MIDDLEBURY, Indiana, in early September 1940, bound for Tidewater Virginia. Though “pioneer days” were long past, and we were headed east instead of west, our family was not unlike those earlier travelers who trekked cross-country in search of their own Promised Land.

The household goods were loaded onto a covered big truck, my older siblings—Irene, Mahlon, Clarence, Katie Ann, Mary Alice, and Vernon—stashed in among our belongings, while Mom, Dad, and I—baby Edwin—rode

up front. (The twins, William and Wilmer were born the following June 12, 1941.) At this late date, sister Irene can’t recall how long the trip took, only that, “it seemed to take forever. But we children didn’t suffer. Dad would stop every so often and let us get out. The law probably wouldn’t let you do something like that today, but it was different then.”

Indeed it was! There were no interstate highways. Paved, narrow two-lane roads twisted up and down across the West Virginia and Pennsylvania

The former W.W. Oliver farm, circa 1953, on Holland Swamp Road where the Irvin Weaver family lived. Courtesy of Mrs. Jack Lennon



mountains. Travel was a snail's pace compared with today. I'm sure we spent several days along the way.

Several factors seem to have brought about Mom and Dad's decision to leave the Hoosier state. First off, Mom, not yet thirty, was having health problems. The promise of milder climate, away from the harsh winters of northern Indiana, surely had a pleasant appeal. Along with that, Aunt Maude—Dad's brother Will's wife—visiting in Indiana, had described a job opportunity on the W. W. Oliver farm near Uncle Will's on Holland Swamp Road. Dad, always seeking to better our lot, considered the opportunity too good to pass up.

Besides Dad's brother Will, another brother, Mahlon, and his family were living in the Deep Creek Amish community, twenty miles from Kempsville. A year or so after our arrival, they moved onto the former Eli M. Yoder farm, along Princess Anne Road, two miles southeast of Kempsville. The farm buildings were set across the road from present Woodtide Shopping Center. Uncle Mahlons lived there until they moved to Montezuma, Georgia, in 1953. The Fred Yoder family lived there last before the buildings were razed for the Dunbarton housing development.

The fact that the Amish-Mennonites at Kempsville were switching from horse-and-buggy travel to cars was likely an added incentive for our move to Virginia. Joining the Beachy Church eight hundred miles from our former home would cause less stir among

relatives than if we had gone directly from the Old Order Amish to an automobile church in Indiana.

The house on the Oliver farm wasn't ready for occupancy when we arrived. Sister Irene Yoder, who still lives in Chesapeake, remembers that we stayed with Uncle Will and Aunt Maude at least a couple nights. How we managed all that seems beyond comprehension today—two sets of parents, and fourteen children crammed into uncle Wills' small frame two-story. The house, surrounded by woods, stood near the present-day entrance to Mount Trashmore. Sisters Katie Ann and Mary Alice recall we then moved briefly into a small house in the area until the farmhouse became available.

The Oliver farm buildings were at the end of a lane several hundred yards long. The ramshackle two-story was cold and drafty during the winter, but it was home and I have some fond memories of the years we lived there. In the beginning, most of the farmland was planted in strawberries and Dad worked for Mr. Oliver. Later, after we rented the farm, Dad bought Guernsey cows and we began shipping milk to Yoder Dairies in Kempsville.

We had an average-size herd for that day—fifteen to sixteen milking and several dry cows. The animals, though, were what kept us busy with barn chores twice a day, and growing the feed crops—hay and grain—during the warm months. I remember with particular fondness harvesttime, hot and sweaty as it often was. There was

far less automation then, and while all owned tractors and wagons, few farmers had all the equipment needed to bring in the crops. Several would jointly own a grain binder, threshing machine, and ensilage cutter and blower for silo-filling.

Neighbors would take turns helping one another making hay, shocking wheat, and filling silo. Our neighborhood crew included Abe Peachey and the brothers, Sol and Crist W. Yoder. With the need for tractor drivers in the field and to shuttle wagons to and from the barn, every boy ten and older was now in his element. Though too small to throw wheat sheaves or work the loose hay coming onto the wagon, we learned early the skills of manipulating the clutch and throttle on the Oliver 70s, Farmalls, John Deeres, and Ford-Fergusons. Admittedly, it wasn't all fun and games, especially when an older brother or Dad yelled at you for a sharp turn that threatened to upset a wagon. However, the grown-up feeling that came with driving a tractor outweighed those occasional embarrassments.

An added bonus at harvesttime was the abundant supply of ice-cold lemonade and the true threshers' feasts Mom and sisters put together—mashed potatoes, rich gravy, fried chicken or canned beef chunks, creamed corn and other garden vegetables, topped off with two or three desserts. Talk about mouth-watering memories! I also always enjoyed our family tradition of soda pop and hot dogs for Saturday evening supper.

Though I was only six when World War II ended in August 1945, I recall being frightened by events of the time. While the war was going on, U.S. soldiers sometimes rode or marched past our farm. Now and again, trucks towing big guns would drive by. Once, during a practice exercise, a tank carrying a number of soldiers rolled onto our field of freshly raked hay. Brother Vernon and I stared as the men began scooping up hay. Within minutes the tank and its gun had been camouflaged with hay, ready for battle—best as we could tell. Terrified, we set off running. “They’re not going to get me,” Vernon pronounced as we ran, full tilt, for the house.

With its numerous military bases, the Hampton Roads area was considered a prime target for invading German forces. Car owners were required to paint the top half of their headlights black, so as to be less visible to enemy aircraft at night. The threat was not as far-fetched as it may seem today. German submarines planted mines in the shipping lanes in the lower Chesapeake Bay, and on one occasion American warplanes sank a German sub east of Cape Henry. Observers along the Virginia Beach oceanfront watched the battle as it raged several miles offshore. Those were scary times for me and many other children, particularly, when a grown-up, half in jest, would say things like, “The Japs gonna drop bombs on us one a these times.”

Strange as it now seems, at the same time we feared a distant enemy, we were

learning to know the Germans on a personal level. German prisoners of war from nearby Camp Ashby—presently the site of Virginia Beach Central Library—were brought out by the day as farm laborers. Escorted by armed guards at first, the men cut brush, cleaned out stables or helped in the fields. After the war ended, they were no longer guarded as carefully as before. Because of our own Pennsylvania-German dialect, it was relatively easy for Amish-Mennonites to communicate with the prisoners. Most were friendly, but lonely for home and family; nevertheless, several became strongly attached to their American employers.

Leroy Miller recalls being present at the emotional parting in early 1946, when John J. Miller dropped off Gottfried Heidweider for the final time at Camp Ashby. Johns' family and the personable young German had developed a strong friendship over a couple years. Now, Gottfried was returning to his homeland. Both men wept openly as they bade a last farewell. The Millers corresponded with Gottfried for several years afterward.

I have many pleasant memories of my years at Kempsville Mennonite School on Overland Drive. Minister Jake Hershberger drove the bus for Holland Swamp Road. I remember Jake as a kindly man. On occasion, he would reward us for good behavior. Stopping at one of the country stores along the route, Jake would announce, "Now children, if you'll be quiet, I'll go in and buy you some candy." Rest assured, we

were quiet as a busload of lively school children can be.

The annual end-of-school picnic was an event my siblings and I always enjoyed. Our family never went on outings together, so this trip to Sandbridge was a highlight in our lives. Roasting hotdogs and marshmallows over an open fire, washing the food down with all the soda pop you could hold, and playing along the remote, unspoiled beach turned into an unforgettable experience.

Around 1950, Mr. Oliver sold the Holland Swamp Road farm to Jake Hershberger. We continued to live there for a time until Jake's son, Henry wanted to farm the place. We then moved to the Midgette dairy farm on Stumpy Lake Road, where several of our family were employed. Here, our closest neighbors were Cleo and Betty Franklin, a black couple. We soon struck up a friendship with Betty, a warm, gracious woman. However, not until Mom became ill in 1953 did we come to fully appreciate the depth of Betty's true Christian character. Along with church sisters from the Kempsville congregation, Betty Franklin helped sister Mary Alice with our mother's day-to-day care—bathing, feeding, and all that was involved in caring for Mother. Even after forty-plus years, the Christian love shown us by the Kempsville congregation continues to bless and inspire our family. We especially remember the warm response of visits and food from many persons during our mother's last



A. B. Midgette farm where the Weavers lived on Indian River Road, presently Rosemont Forest. Courtesy of Edwin Weaver

illness and death November 19, 1953.

Church life played an important role in our family. We always attended church services every other Sunday, as well as Sunday school on the in-between Sundays, at the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church. I also recall being at Deep Creek Mennonite Church with my parents when Emory Yutzy of Plain City, Ohio, preached there.

Of all the meetings we attended, probably none had greater effect on our family than Evangelist Andrew Jantzi's 1953 spring tent revival. Jantzi's big tent was set up on the present site of Woodstock Elementary School on Providence Road. The meetings were held nightly for several weeks, and

included congregational singing led by Marcus Byler of Gap, Pennsylvania; quartet singing by the Gingerich Sisters—Elizabeth, Verna, Betty, and Anna—of Hartville, Ohio; and hour-long sermons by Jantzi.

I first heard God's call on my life during this revival; however, too timid to respond with open commitment, I waited until three years later at age fifteen, to publicly acknowledge Jesus as my Saviour. It was here at Jantzi's meetings, Jack Lennon, my future brother-in-law, came to know the Lord. He later married sister Mary Alice. Today they live at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and Jack remains a faithful follower of Christ.



The home on the Midgette farm where Mary Weaver died in 1953. Courtesy of Edwin Weaver

Five months after Mom's funeral, Dad and we children still at home, moved back to the Middlebury, Indiana area, where she had been buried. Soon afterward, Dad met a widow, Savilla Sommers, from Hartville, Ohio. After their marriage, the twins—William and Wilmer—and I moved with Dad and our stepmother to the Hartville area. Dad and Savilla lived there until his death, June 1, 1990.

My wife Martha and I spent two years, 1965–1967, in the country of Belize in mission work. Today we live on a farm in Guernsey County, Ohio. I was ordained to the Christian ministry in 1968, and to office of bishop in 1977. We are members of Antrim (Beachy) Mennonite Church. I serve there with a fellow minister and deacon. Over the years Martha and I raised ten sons of our own and cared for foster children.

Reflecting on my childhood in Virginia, I believe the Kempsville Mennonite Church and school helped

me develop a special appreciation for worship, learning and community. From that base we have found contentment in our lives. We praise the Lord for His constant faithfulness, and if crowns are given when this life is over, we look forward to casting them at Jesus' feet.

Left to right, circa 1955: Eli Kauffman, Eli Weaver, and Clarence Yoder. Courtesy of Leroy Miller



Kempsville Mennonite School: Its Beginnings

by Elmer S. Yoder

Teachers, 1954. Left to right: Esther Overholt, Mary Hershberger, Betty Hershberger, and Elsie Yoder. Courtesy of Mary (Hershberger) Swartzentruber

AMISH-MENNONITE PARENTS HAVE LONG considered elementary education through the seventh and eighth grades desirable and necessary for their children. However, major problems have arisen when state and local laws demanded attendance beyond the elementary level. From the early 1920s,

Ohio's strict enforcement of its attendance code led to a decades-long struggle between Amish parents of high-school-age students and school authorities. To escape what they believed was an infringement of their religious beliefs, some Amish families left their home communities to relocate





in areas where compulsory attendance laws were nonexistent or not enforced. In fact, two families from Ohio moved to Princess Anne County, Virginia, for that very reason.

From its beginnings around 1900, the Kempsville Amish community's children attended the local public schools, usually Kempsville, Court-house, or Bayside. At the time, Virginia elementary grades did not include an eighth grade. Most Amish-Mennonite

children completed seventh grade and quit. By then, it was assumed, one had learned sufficiently the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic—all that was necessary for a farming, carpentry, or other nonprofessional rural livelihood. While an individual teacher might occasionally encourage an apt pupil to consider higher education, there was no pressure from Princess Anne County officials.

That began to change, though, in

Happy girls, 1955. Front row, left to right: Dorothy Yoder, Mary Stoll, Ruth Hershberger, Mary Beiler, and Elsie Mast. Back row: Katie Miller, Anne Overholt, Mary Overholt, Carolyn Overholt, and Marilyn Overholt. Courtesy of Mary (Hershberger) Swartzentruber

early 1946. A lady from the Virginia State Board of Education in Richmond came to the area to press the recently enacted attendance law that required all children younger than age sixteen to be in school. The cause immediately sent out warning signals to the Amish-Mennonites. The Joe I. Hershberger Sr. family had left Geauga County, Ohio, after Joe was jailed for refusing to enroll his two oldest sons, Jonas and Jake, in high school classes. Several years later, Joe I.'s sister, Sarah (the John B. Yoder family) followed the Hershbergers to Kempsville when John also faced jail for keeping their oldest daughter, Elmina, out of high school.

At this late date it is uncertain when a private Christian day school was first seriously discussed at Kempsville. However, I recorded in my personal diary, January 1, 1944, that my parents had attended a meeting at the church house to talk about private schools. While my diary entry confirms some earlier interest in a Christian day school, the 1946 state mandate lent urgency to the matter. A school board of five directors—Joe I. Hershberger Sr., Lloyd W. Yoder, Jonas Miller Jr., Joe I. Hershberger Jr., and Henry Overholt—was appointed September 23, 1946.

Local county officials were tolerant, if not altogether supportive, of Amish-Mennonite intentions. While an eighth grade would be included in the new school, there were no plans for classes beyond that level. The letter of Virginia's attendance law could be

served by having a student under age sixteen repeat the eighth grade.

Though no school building existed at the time, the first classes for Kempsville Mennonite School opened in October 1946 with two sixth graders—my sister, Dorothy, and Sadie E. Yoder—and seventeen seventh graders. Classes were held in an upstairs room of the Francis B. Miller home. Rufus and Mary Yoder and their family owned the farm and lived there later. Kempsville Meadows Elementary School was later built on the site.

Elizabeth Gingerich from Hartville, Ohio, taught the 1946–1947 term. In a recent conversation with Leroy Miller, Alta Miller Krause recalled several of her peers' and her own disappointment that there was no eighth grade. "The problem was that no one was available who felt capable of teaching eighth grade. We weren't very happy having to repeat seventh grade. The work was too easy for most of us. We did, however, learn valuable things in Bible and music classes."

Meanwhile, work was moving forward with organization and construction plans for the new school building. The board of directors appointed Joe I. Hershberger Sr., Lloyd W. Yoder, and Frank Overholt to serve as building committee. A site, approximately 3.5 acres, was purchased from Eli Swartzentruber along present Overland Road. The road then served as Swartzentruber's lane. It jogged left directly in front of the big farmhouse, wound down and across the spillway to



Aerial view of the Kempsville Mennonite School on Overland Drive, circa 1950. Part of the Will Overholt farm is at upper left and the Eli Swartzentruber farm is directly above. Courtesy of C. H. "Curly" Byler



Will Overholt's pond, past the Overholt farm buildings and out to present Parliament Drive, a couple hundred yards south of Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church.

Actual construction on the eighty-seven-by-forty-foot structure began in early 1947. In a January entry in my personal diary, I wrote that some of the men were "cutting logs for the school-house." The logs likely came from the elder Joe I. Hershberger's woods and were sawn into framing lumber at his mill off Holland Swamp Road. Mrs. Enos W. Yoder, Kempsville correspondent for the *Sugarcreek* [Ohio] *Budget*, wrote in a February report that, "Most of the foundation, as well as the boiler room has been cemented."

The building had a hip roof—an innovation for the Amish-Mennonite community; exterior walls were of masonry blocks, stuccoed. Interior walls were wood framing covered with cement plaster. The classrooms were floored with varnished oak boards. concrete was used for the floors in the large front lobby and restrooms. Work on the building progressed well, considering that nearly all the labor was donated by men whose livelihoods depended on twice-a-day milking of dairy cows and the planting and harvesting of farm crops. The Kempsville Amish Mennonite community believed in this endeavor that would directly affect the educational and spiritual development of their children for decades to come. The only work that needed to be hired out was for the



Kempsville Mennonite School on Overland Drive. Courtesy of Mary Zook

steam heating system and the interior hard wall plaster. Joe I. Hershberger Jr. remembers the approximate cost was \$13,000 for the four-classroom structure, with a roofed front porch.

As Kempsville Mennonite School grew into a physical reality, so did my anticipation, though mixed with some anxiety. In late 1946 and early 1947 as serious discussion had gotten underway about having our own parochial school, my mother, Lydia, and brothers, Denver and Galen, began urging me to apply for a teaching job. Though I was not adverse to the idea, I felt if the Lord wanted me to be a schoolteacher the call would come from the School Board. The issue was important for me. Due to my limited education, I did not want to act unwisely and place myself into a position that could prove unsuccessful.

From my early teens, I had taken a keen interest in reading and Bible study. In September 1945, I enrolled in Bible doctrine and Old Testament history correspondence courses from Eastern Mennonite School—now Eastern Mennonite University—at

Harrisonburg, Virginia. A year later, on a trip to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, I purchased the five-volume set of the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* and Edersheim's two-volume *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* at the Mennonite Publishing House bookstore. Despite all that, my formal seventh-grade schooling left me with much uncertainty as September 1947 approached. I, nevertheless, also recognized God's leading me to the position of teacher at the new Kempsville Mennonite School.

Confirmation had come over several months from conversations with my father, Simon L. Yoder; minister Jacob Hershberger; School Board member, Lloyd W. Yoder, and finally, on July 22, 1947, when School Board members nominated Jacob J. Hershberger, Frieda Yoder, and me, Elmer S. Yoder, to serve

as teachers. While I do not recall exactly when I responded to the Board's request, suffice it to say I consented and at age twenty-one moved from cornfield to classroom.

My decision could not have been based on a lavish wage offer—\$100 a month for the eight-month term, plus \$32 a month for driving one of the two school buses, no princely sum even for that day. On September 19, 1947, I stepped into my first day of a teaching career that would span thirty-two years in both Christian and public school classrooms.

Looking back now, the task I had undertaken seems nothing short of formidable—attempting to teach three grades with 44 pupils out of a total student body of 110. Frieda Yoder taught first, second, and third; Jacob Hershberger, seventh and eighth; and I,

The "Beetle" bus, circa 1958.
Courtesy of Joe Hershberger



fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The following year, 1948–1949, I had fewer students with the fourth, fifth, and seventh grades but not until my last year, 1949–1950, at Kempsville did the work load drop to two grades—five and six. We opened the fourth classroom that year with Martha R. Yoder teaching first and second; Elsie Yoder, third and fourth; I, Elmer S. Yoder, fifth and sixth; and Jacob Hershberger, seventh and eighth.

Compared to some private church schools of the time, the new building was spacious and pleasant, with large double windows all around. The playground was large enough for a full-size baseball diamond, and two smaller diamonds for the younger children. However, during those first years Kempsville Mennonite School lacked several important elements: there was no central library and practically no reference material except a multi-volume set of *Encyclopedia Britannica, Jr.*, donated by Valentine E. Miller. Without a spirit duplicator or mimeograph, putting together tests and other important assignments was often a difficult task. On occasion, I used my own hectograph which required a jelly substance and each sheet of paper applied by hand. The process, cumbersome and messy, often resulted in unattractive copies.

Yet, in spite of the apparent inadequacies, there were many positive aspects to our Christian day school program at Kempsville. The students learned the basic subjects: math,

English, geography, history, health, and most importantly, reading. I do not believe any student left from there without some proficiency in reading, and many read at and above their grade levels. Beyond all that, the Bible and music classes added spiritual qualities that could never have been gained in public education.

Though formal Bible and music classes were not held daily, Tuesday-through-Friday school days began with a fifteen-to-twenty-minute devotional period in individual classrooms. Time was spent singing several hymns from the Mennonite *Church and Sunday School Hymnal*, followed with a Bible story or reading and prayer. On Mondays, a combined assembly was held with all the students and teachers in the largest classroom. The younger children sat double to a desk, while the older boys and girls, teachers, and visitors stood along the walls.

To begin, I would lead the group in a couple hymns from the old Mennonite *Church and Sunday School Hymnal*. Jacob Hershberger would then introduce the visiting speaker, often one of the other ministers from church. Now and then, a visitor from out of town would teach a Bible truth with an illustrative story. The devotional always included a spoken prayer.

While not all teachers held music classes, I began teaching the rudiments of music with shaped notes during my first year at Kempsville Mennonite School. Though not all of the students learned to read music, many developed

Kempsville Mennonite School Teachers, 1947–1970

Due to incomplete records, we are unable to list accurately all the years in which the following persons taught.

Billington, Margaret	1964
Brenneman, Sarah	1950
Gingerich, Aden	1956–1957
Gingerich, Elizabeth	1946–1947
Hershberger, Betty	1954–1956
Hershberger, Elma Jean	1958–1959, 1961
Hershberger, Jean	1961–1962, 1966–1967
Hershberger, Jacob J.	1947–1950
Hershberger, Lester	1958–1962, 1966–1967
Hershberger, Martha	1961–1963, 1964–1965
Hershberger, Mary	1951–1957
Hershberger, Sarah J.	1957–1961
Hochstetler, Walter	1963–1964
Kanagy, John	1948–1949, 1955–1956
Kanagy, Martha	1968–1969
Mast, Verna	1964–1966
Maust, Alma	1950–1952
Miller, Alta Marie	1962–1964, 1968–1970
Miller, Eunice	1963–1964
Miller, Leroy	1967–1971
Miller, Paul	1957–1958
Overholt, Christine	1966
Overholt, Elsie	1964–1965
Overholt, Esther	1952–1954
Overholt, Martha Jane (Hershberger)	1961–1962
Overholt, Ruth H.	1956–1957
Overholt, Ruth V.	1965–1966
Short, Richard	1957–1958
Sommers, Elson	1952–1955
Stoll, Mary	1968–1969
Swartzentruber, Chris	1962–1963
Yoder, Elmer S.	1947–1950
Yoder, Elsie	1948–1957
Yoder, Frieda	1947–1948
Yoder, Leora	1959–1961
Yoder, Marie	1957–1962
Yoder, Martha	1949–1951
Yoder, Viola	1950–1952

Teachers, 1962. In front, left to right, are Jean Hershberger and Martha Hershberger. Marie Yoder and Christian Swartzentruber are in back. Courtesy of Marie Yoder



Teachers, 1959. In front, left to right, are Sarah Hershberger and Marie Yoder. Elma Hershberger and Lester Hershberger are in back. Courtesy of Leora (Overholt) Swartzentruber



Attendance Roll, 1947-1970

Antrim, Ronnie	Coblentz, Rose Marie	Hershberger, Judy Lavonne	Kramer, Clara
Atkinson, David	Flora, Donny	Hershberger, Kathy	Kramer, Daniel
Atkinson, Robert	Flora, Howard	Hershberger, Lloyd Dale	Kramer, David
Beiler, Floyd	Flora, Robert	Hershberger, Lloyd J.	Kramer, Edna
Beiler, John	Garrison, Billy	Hershberger, Malinda	Kramer, Mary
Beiler, Marcus	Gingerich, Carolyn	Hershberger, Marilyn	Kramer, Miriam
Beiler, Marilyn	Gingerich, Donnie	Hershberger, Marjorie	Kramer, Pauline
Beiler, Marvin	Gingerich, Ruby	Hershberger, Mark	Kramer, Rachel
Beiler, Mary	Hershberger, Amanda	Hershberger, Martha Ann	Kramer, Raymond
Beiler, Merlin	Hershberger, Annie	Hershberger, Martha Jane	Kramer, Samuel
Beiler, Nancy	Hershberger, Betty Lou	Hershberger, Mary Lois	Kurtz, Freddie
Beiler, Naomi	Hershberger, Brenda	Hershberger, Merle	Landis, Joy
Beiler, Nathan	Hershberger, Dale	Hershberger, Merlin	Landis, Paul Mark
Beiler, Paul, Jr.	Hershberger, Daniel	Hershberger, Paul (Henry)	Mast, Barbara
Beiler, Paul (Menno)	Hershberger, David Lynn	Hershberger, Paul (Jacob)	Mast, Darrel
Beiler, Pauline	Hershberger, David Wayne	Hershberger, Paul (Lester)	Mast, Elizabeth
Beiler, Philip	Hershberger, Dawn	Hershberger, Pauline	Mast, Elsie
Beiler, Rachel	Hershberger, Debbie	Hershberger, Philip	Mast, Ernest
Beiler, Sara Joy	Hershberger, Dianne	Hershberger, Ruth	Mast, Fannie
Beiler, Wayne	Hershberger, Donald	Hershberger, Sarah	Mast, Jonathon
Bontrager, Alvin James	Hershberger, Dorothy	Hershberger, Shirley	Mast, Karen
Bontrager, Eli Ray	Hershberger, Dwayne	Hershberger, Twila	Mast, Martha
Bontrager, Sara Mae	Hershberger, Edna	Hershberger, Wayne	Mast, Moses
Brenneman, Alton Ray	Hershberger, Edward	Hershberger, Wesley	Mast, Jerome
Brenneman, Dorcas	Hershberger, Ellen	Hyatt, Dale	Mast, John
Brenneman, Fern	Hershberger, Elma	Kanagy, David	Mast, Paul
Brenneman, Henry	Hershberger, Elmer	Kanagy, Elsie	Mast, Pete
Brenneman, Ida Marie	Hershberger, Esther	Kanagy, Joseph	Mast, Sarah
Brenneman, Lloyd Daniel	Hershberger, Fannie	Kanagy, Martha	Mast, Viola
Brenneman, Lela	Hershberger, Gloria	Kanagy, Virgil	Miller, Alta Marie
Brenneman, Martha	Hershberger, Ivan	Kauffman, Eli	Miller, Amos
Brenneman, Philip	Hershberger, Jacob J., Jr.	Kauffman, Laura	Miller, Anna Doris
Brenneman, Rhoda	Hershberger, James	Kauffman, Marvin	Miller, Anna V.
Brenneman, Ruth	Hershberger, John	Kauffman, Raymond	Miller, Barbara Ann
Chandler, Hilda	Hershberger, JoAnne	Kauffman, Rhoda	Miller, Betty Elaine (Elvin)
Chandler, Joyce	Hershberger, John Henry	Kauffman, Richard	Miller, Betty Elaine (J. B.)
Chupp, Anna Mae	Hershberger, Joseph A.	Kauffman, Ronald	Miller, Betty Jane
Chupp, Katie Ann	Hershberger, Joseph M.	Kauffman, Ruth	Miller, Betty Linda
Chupp, Vernon	Hershberger, Joseph J., Jr.	Kramer, Alvin	Miller, Clara
Coblentz, Jonathon	Hershberger, Judith	Kramer, Carrie	Miller, Carol

Miller, Donald	Miller, Leon	Miller, Keith	Overholt, Anne
Miller, Edith	Miller, Leroy	Miller, Mabel	Overholt, Arland Ray
Miller, Eli V.	Miller, Lester J.	Miller, Martha Catherine	Overholt, Arlene
Miller, Ellen Louise	Miller, Lester Wayne	Miller, Mary Ellen	Overholt, Betty
Miller, Elsie	Miller, Linda Joy	Miller, Mollie Catherine	Overholt, Carol
Miller, Elvin	Miller, Louela	Miller, Olen	Overholt, Carolyn
Miller, Ernest Ray	Miller, Mabel	Miller, Phyllis	Overholt, Catherine
Miller, Ernest V.	Miller, Martha Katherine	Miller, Raymond	Overholt, Christine
Miller, Harold	Miller, Martin	Miller, Robert	Overholt, David Jay
Miller, Harvey	Miller, Maynard	Miller, Ruby	Overholt, Donald
Miller, James Ervin	Miller, Michael	Miller, Sam	Overholt, Elmo
Miller, James Monroe	Miller, Miriam	Miller, Sarah Jane	Overholt, Elsie
Miller, Jonas	Miller, Nelson	Miller, Sarah V.	Overholt, Frank, Jr.
Miller, Joseph Atwel	Miller, Janet Sue	Miller, Shirley	Overholt, Harold
Miller, Joseph Eugene	Miller, Joas B., Jr.	Miller, Teresa Gail	Overholt, Helen
Miller, Kathy	Miller, John H., II	Miller, Val E., Jr.	Overholt, Henry
Miller, Larry J.	Miller, Jonas J.	Miller, Walter	Overholt, Irene
Miller, LaVern	Miller, Katie	Miller, Willard	Overholt, Jerry



First and Second Grade, 1958-1959. Back row, left to right: Calvin Troyer, John Mast, Merle Hershberger, Ruth Zook, Martha Miller, Lloyd Troyer, Wayne Beiler, Donald Overholt, Omar Yoder, and Dorothy Yoder. Third row: Edward Yoder, Merlin Beiler, Katie Ann Chupp, Allen Swarey, David Overholt, Joseph Miller, Eldon Yoder, and Maynard Miller. Second row: Verda Plank, Pauline Plank, Dawn Hershberger, Shirley Yoder, Sharon Yoder, Irene Overholt, Mose Mast, Dallas Stutzman, and Ivan Yoder. First row: Marjorie Hershberger, Esther Yoder, Rhoda Brenneman, Alta Zook, David Swartzentruber, and David Hershberger. Courtesy of Marie Yoder

Overholt, Joanna	Overholt, Simon	Stoll, Dennis	Swartzentruber, Noah
Overholt, Joseph	Overholt, Susanna	Stoll, Johnny	Swartzentruber, Norma Gail
Overholt, Lavern	Overholt, Timothy	Stoll, Linda Gail	Swartzentruber, Norman
Overholt, Leona (Fred)	Overholt, Titus	Stoll, Marvin	Swartzentruber, Ray
Overholt, Lee Roy	Overholt, Verda	Stoll, Mary	Swartzentruber, Ruth
Overholt, Lena	Overholt, Victor	Stoll, Robert	Swartzentruber, Ruth Elaine
Overholt, Leona (Will)	Overholt, William J., Jr.	Stoll, William, Jr.	Swartzentruber, Susan
Overholt, Leora	Ownbey, Billy	Stutzman, Barbara	Troyer, Alice
Overholt, Lewis	Ownbey, Helen	Stutzman, Dallas	Troyer, Calvin
Overholt, Lillie June	Ownbey, James	Stutzman, Jay Henry	Troyer, Edith
Overholt, Lois	Ownbey, Patsy	Stutzman, Larry	Troyer, Eli
Overholt, Marcus	Ownbey, Peggy	Stutzman, Linda	Troyer, Ezra, Jr.
Overholt, Marilyn	Peachy, Jantzi Ray	Stutzman, Loretta	Troyer, James
Overholt, Mary	Peachy, John	Swarey, Allen	Troyer, John
Overholt, Mart	Peachy, Leroy Val	Swarey, Thomas	Troyer, Julius
Overholt, Martha	Plank, Daniel	Swartzentruber, Bertha	Troyer, Lilly
Overholt, Mervin	Plank, Edward	Swartzentruber, Catharine	Troyer, Lloyd
Overholt, Miriam	Plank, Elva	Swartzentruber, Danie	Troyer, Martha
Overholt, Naomi	Plank, David	Swartzentruber, David (Chris)	Troyer, Mary
Overholt, Paul	Plank, Irene	Swartzentruber, David Leroy	Troyer, Nelson
Overholt, Robert	Plank, Lewis	Swartzentruber, Enos	Troyer, Robert
Overholt, Rosa	Plank, Maynard	Swartzentruber, Ida Mae	Troyer, Ruth
Overholt, Rose Marie	Plank, Pauline	Swartzentruber, Laban	Troyer, Sharon
Overholt, Ruth	Plank, Ralph	Swartzentruber, Lloyd	Warren, Tommy
Overholt, Rudy	Plank, Ruth	Swartzentruber, Loretta	Weaver, Alma
Overholt, Sara Mae	Plank, Verda	Swartzentruber, Mildred	Weaver, Bertha



Fifth and Sixth Grade, 1958-1959.
Back row, left to right: Elma Hershberger (teacher), Viola Yoder, Anna Miller, Ruby Miller, Christine Overholt, Robert Paul Yoder, and Donny Gingerich. **Third row:** Martha Anne Hershberger, Vernon Chupp, Marvin Beiler, Ernest Mast, Ezra Troyer, Miriam Kramer, Lena Overholt, and Elizabeth Mast. **Second row:** Rudy Overholt, Marcus Overholt, Robert Yoder, Wayne Hershberger, Paul Mark Landis, Carolyn Gingerich, Carol Joy Landis, and Elsie Mast. **First row:** Paul Overholt, Jay Henry Stutzman, Billy Stoll, Leon Zook, Ivan Hershberger, Joas Miller, Ellen Miller, and Patricia Yoder. Courtesy of Katie Miller



Student Body, 1970. Back row: Alta Marie Miller (teacher), Nelson Troyer, Joseph A. Hershberger, Leon Miller, Julius Troyer, Joseph Kanagy, and Teresa Miller. **Third row:** Ida Marie Brenneman, Rachel Beiler, Roseanne Yoder, Dorcas Brenneman, Sharon Troyer, Joanne Hershberger, Pauline Beiler, Judy Hershberger, and Linda Miller. **Second row:** Betty Miller, Dianne Hershberger, James Troyer, Eli Troyer, David Kanagy, Ernest Miller, and Nelson Miller. **First row:** Samuel Miller, David Hershberger, Dwayne Hershberger, Lilly Troyer, Gloria Hershberger, Dale Hershberger, Michael Miller, Ronald Kauffman, Debra Hershberger, and Leroy Miller (teacher). Courtesy of Leroy Miller

Weaver, Barbara
Weaver, Edwin
Weaver, Eli
Weaver, Katie Ann
Weaver, Katie M.
Weaver, Mahlon, Jr.
Weaver, Mary
Weaver, Mary Alice
Weaver, Noah
Weaver, Vernon
Weaver, Walter
Weaver, William
Weaver, Wilmer
Yoakum, Barry
Yoder, Allen E.
Yoder, Allen (Melvin)
Yoder, Allen N.

Yoder, Alta
Yoder, Annie R.
Yoder, Arlene
Yoder, Barbara Ellen
Yoder, Barbara R.
Yoder, Bertha Grace
Yoder, Clarence N.
Yoder, Claude
Yoder, Clifford
Yoder, Clifton
Yoder, Cora
Yoder, Daniel
Yoder, David
Yoder, Dorothy
Yoder, Dorothy Gail
Yoder, Dorothy Jane
Yoder, Effie Grace

Yoder, Edward
Yoder, Eldon
Yoder, Eli R.
Yoder, Elmer (John Henry)
Yoder, Elmina
Yoder, Elva
Yoder, Enos S.
Yoder, Ernest
Yoder, Esther (Jerry)
Yoder, Esther (Rudy)
Yoder, Eugene
Yoder, Floyd
Yoder, Galen
Yoder, Irene
Yoder, Ivan Wayne
Yoder, Jerry, Jr.
Yoder, Johnny (Menno)

Yoder, John Henry, Jr.
Yoder, Joyce
Yoder, Julian
Yoder, Kenneth
Yoder, Laura Mae
Yoder, Laura Catherine
Yoder, Lavern
Yoder, Lena
Yoder, Leon
Yoder, Leora
Yoder, Malinda
Yoder, Marie (J. Elmer)
Yoder, Marie (Sol)
Yoder, Marie S.
Yoder, Marilyn
Yoder, Mary
Yoder, Melvin Dale

Yoder, Melvin E.	Yoder, Robert Paul	Yoder, Verda
Yoder, Melvin Lloyd, Jr.	Yoder, Robert R.	Yoder, Verna E.
Yoder, Melvin R.	Yoder, Roy (Clark)	Yoder, Verna (Melvin)
Yoder, Noah W., Jr.	Yoder, Roy (J. Elmer)	Yoder, William S.
Yoder, Olen	Yoder, Sadie E.	Yoder, William R.
Yoder, Omar	Yoder, Sarah N.	Yoder, Willie J.
Yoder, Owen	Yoder, Sharon Kay	Zook, Alta
Yoder, Patricia	Yoder, Shirley Fay	Zook, David
Yoder, Paul R.	Yoder, S. Melvin	Zook, Katie
Yoder, Paul W.	Yoder, Sol, Jr.	Zook, Leon
Yoder, Pauline	Yoder, Tillie	Zook, Ruth
Yoder, Robert (John Henry)	Yoder, Treva	Zook, Sara

fine singing voices for the a cappella four-part harmony that has long been the mainstay of Mennonite Church music.

As mentioned earlier in the Simon L. Yoder section of this account (chapter 11), I left the Kempsville area in 1950, after three years of teaching at Kempsville Mennonite School. In the years since, I taught an additional twenty-nine years in both elementary and high school. I was ordained to the ministry on July 8, 1956, and bishop on August 27, 1978. A total of thirty-eight years have been given in service on Christian school boards from elementary school through college. My editorial duties of *The Conservative* periodical have covered eighteen years. In addition, I am editing a quarterly historical paper and am serving on the boards of several historical societies. I have authored seven books and coauthored two. Esther and I have coordinated, for ten years, a monthly senior citizens meeting in the Hartville community.

Esther and I have three children and eight grandchildren. Dorcas is manager of Berean Bookstore in Canton, Ohio. Elwood is a teacher of Bible and history at Eastern Mennonite High School in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and Jason is pastor of Cornerstone Mennonite Church of Hartville, Ohio, where Esther and I have our membership.



The old Kempsville Mennonite School, 1995, on Overland Drive is now the Tidewater Korean Baptist Church. The new school is part of the church at 3621 North Landing Road in Virginia Beach pictured in chapter 2. Courtesy of Leon R. Zook

*The Troyer and Kramer Families:
Ezra and Amanda (Kramer) Troyer*

by Sharon Troyer

MY TRIPLE-GREAT-GRANDFATHER, Christian Nissley, arrived in America, October 12, 1804. Like many Europeans, Grandfather left his German homeland to escape the servitude endured by the common people of that time. Most of the rural countryside was owned by rich nobles and dukes who passed their holdings on to their heirs. To survive, the lower class eked out a bare existence as servants and farm

laborers on the large estates of these aristocrats. Should they meet master or mistress on the street, they were expected to scrape and bow before their superiors. Christian Nissley left that behind for freedom in America.

Sometime after arriving in the United States, Christian joined the Amish Church, married, and was later ordained a minister. We Troyers and Kramers are linked to Grandfather



Ezra Troyer residence near the 500 block of Independence Boulevard in Virginia Beach, circa 1958. Courtesy of Sharon Troyer

Christian through his son, Abraham, whose daughter, Elizabeth, married Emanuel (Monie) Troyer, January 25, 1898, in Reno County, Kansas. Their oldest son, Ezra, became my grandfather.

Known by their Pennsylvania German names as Monie and Lissie, the couple had seven children. Monie had a wanderlust most of his life and the family moved frequently. As natives of Holmes County, Ohio, they lived in Missouri and Kansas and Exeland, Wisconsin, and twice at Middlefield, Ohio, before moving in 1925, to Moyock in northeastern North Carolina. Two years later, Monie moved several miles north, across the state line to Hickory, Virginia.

A blacksmith by trade, Monie was also skilled at turning out hand-made knives. He forge-hammered and tempered the blades from old truck springs and crosscut saw steel, finishing them with riveted and carved wooden handles. Monie found ready sales for his products at Norfolk city's curbside market on Brewer Street. According to a former helper, the blades had a reputation for holding a keen edge.

Though he developed a tremor with advancing age, Monie still managed a delicate task now and then. Once while repairing a pair of eyeglass frames, he held the soldering iron in his shaky hand. At the precise time in the tremble, the tip touched the broken pieces and the job was done.

Monie and Lizzie lived at South Norfolk the last few years of his life.

He died there, December 13, 1935, and is buried at the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite cemetery. Lizzie then went to live with her namesake daughter, Lizzie and son-in-law, Dan



Amanda and Ezra Troyer, circa 1968.
Courtesy of Sharon Troyer

Kramer and family until her death December 5, 1947.

Monie and Lizzie's oldest son, Ezra, my grandfather, married Amanda Kramer two days before Christmas, 1928. The oldest of their twelve children—six girls and six boys—is my father, Joe, who married Catherine Swartzentruber, October 6, 1953. I am the oldest of their three girls and four boys. While all that information may seem insignificant to some readers, I know most Amish and Mennonites enjoy playing the "Mennonite game"—learning who is related to whom.

The Depression years of the 1930s were difficult for the Troyer family. Sometimes there was barely enough food, and that was often less than

nutritious. Living in the Deep Creek area, Ezra worked for a local farmer for ninety cents an hour; however, he was docked ten cents per hour on rainy days. Occasionally, Ezra made a little extra income blacksmithing or turning out a cart or buggy wheel. A strip of flat steel was heated in the forge, curved into a circle, the ends hammered rather than welded, and attached as a rim for the wooden wheel.

Ezra and Amanda were members of the small Deep Creek Old Order Amish community that existed then in the Shilleleigh and West Roads area of Chesapeake. At age thirty-six in 1934, he was ordained to the ministry. While he may not have been as eloquent a speaker as some, Ezra's clear, high-pitched voice kept his audience awake. Once someone asked his daughter, Mary, "Why does your dad talk so loudly?"

Mary, in the presence of the questioner said, "Dad, someone wants to know why you talk so loudly?"

Without lowering his voice a half-tone, Grandpa replied, "So the people can hear me!"

Though Ezra staunchly defended church standards and Christian doctrine, there was one Amish tradition with which he disagreed. That involved the practice of excommunicating for several weeks anyone who had committed a gross sin, regardless of the circumstances. Someone who knew him well says Grandpa felt when a sin was voluntarily confessed, the erring brother or sister needed to be

treated with compassion, rather than as an unrepentant wrong doer.

By the mid-1940s the Amish Church at Deep Creek had dwindled to two or three families. Ezra, Amanda, and their children began attending services with the congregation at Kempsville. By 1946, they bought a car and became members of the church there. A year or two later they moved from Deep Creek to a farm on Landstown Road, owned by Menno L. Yoder. The place, between Princess Anne and Salem Roads, was later owned or leased by Winn Nursery.

While much closer to Kempsville than formerly—here Ezra's children could attend Kempsville Mennonite School seven miles away—the family did not move into the heart of the church community until the early 1950s. At that time the family bought a chicken farm on the south side of Holland Road, between present Edwin Drive and Baxter Road. Baxter then was mostly a footpath, however, a barely passable lane came in to a number of small houses for a couple hundred yards from Princess Anne Road.

Besides the two large ground-level chicken houses, there were living quarters on the second story fronting Holland Road. Directly beneath was the feed storage room, later also used for sorting and crating eggs. In the early years Grandpas raised broilers, but switched to laying hens after broilers became unprofitable. Along with egg

sales at the house, the family also served customers along a regular door-to-door delivery route. As the children grew older and moved away and Ezra's health began to fail, one of the chicken houses was shut down. He then worked part time sharpening saws.

Our house was next door to Grandpa's, and I well remember getting off the school bus, the shop door standing open and the harsh scrape of file against metal as Grandpa whetted a dull saw blade. Now and again, he would stop to gaze at us and the traffic going by.

Grandpa usually took an afternoon nap, and I particularly recall my aunts telling us children, "Now play quietly, Dawdy's sleeping." I'm sure they must

have forgotten how difficult it is for children at play to be quiet.

Ezra Troyers faced their first separation of a family member, October 16, 1965. Sixth child and second son, Robert, twenty-six, went Home to be with the Lord. He had a cerebral hemorrhage while out hunting, and lived only a few hours longer. Robert left behind his wife, Arlene, and three small daughters, Lilly Joy, Faith Amanda, and Martha Ann. Robett and Arlene's son, Robert Lee Jr., was born several months later.

Grandpa's health continued to deteriorate. He became bedfast several months before dying of cancer June 11, 1969. Since then daughters Mary,

Robert Troyer, 1959. Courtesy of Harold Overholt



Clara, Martha, Edith, and Grandma Amanda have all gone to be with Grandpa and Robert in Glory.

Year by year, real estate development—commercial and residential—had crept closer to the Troyers on Holland Road. The desire for less crowded surroundings grew more appealing. In 1971, after selling the property there, Grandma and our family moved to rural Buckingham County, near Farmville, Virginia.

For more than a decade she stayed busy piecing quilts and quilting for other people. However, by the late 1980s, Amanda Troyer had too become a victim of the dreadful cancer that had taken her husband and three daughters. As the illness progressed, she required more care and moved in with her son Calvin's family at Stuarts Draft. There, various members of the extended family cared for Grandma until her Home-going in May 1991. She is buried in the Farmville Mennonite Church cemetery.

DANIEL D. KRAMER AND ELIZABETH (TROYER) KRAMER FAMILY

It is uncertain whether Monie Troyers unmarried children knew the Daniel Kramer family before the Kramers moved to Norfolk County in 1927. However, they apparently lost no time in getting acquainted. The Troyers lived twenty miles away at Moyock, North Carolina, or were in the process of moving to Hickory, Virginia, five or six miles closer to the Deep Creek Amish community.

There was considerable interaction between the Moyock, Hickory, Deep Creek, and Kempsville Churches. Though travel was usually by horse and buggy or hired taxi, young Dan Kramer chose a third option—their bicycle. He rode a two-wheeler from the West Road area to court Monie Troyer's daughter, Lizzie. On one of Dan's visits, as the pair enjoyed each other's company on the porch swing, a chain broke, dumping them onto the floor. A longstanding family joke held that "she fell for him." During this same time, Monies' son, Ezra, was seeing Dan's sister, Amanda—usually called Mandie. Both couples were married December 23, 1928, in a double wedding at Deep Creek.

The Depression of the 1930s was a difficult time for Dan and Lizzie Kramer. Like other couples, finding enough money to support a growing family turned into a constant struggle.



Dan and Lizzie Kramer. Courtesy of Sharon Troyer



Former Dan Kramer residence, circa 1958, located near Mount Trashmore in Virginia Beach. Courtesy of Sharon Troyer

Dan tried his hand at farming—a dairy for a time, but that proved unsuccessful. Later, he worked on a pony ranch.

In 1944, they moved to the Kempsville area and joined the church there. For a number of years they lived just west of Witchduck Road and a couple hundred yards north of present Aragona Boulevard. The tumbledown house set just off the lane that led to the Alpha Peachey home. Great-grandma, Lizzie Troyer, was living there with Dans at the time of her death in 1947.

After the move to Kempsville, Dan began working as block and bricklayer. Besides working for Noah Hershberger for a time in the early 1950s, he worked with his brother Noah Kramer at

Kramer Construction for many years. Several of Dan's sons also took up masonry work.

Regular hourly wages brought in a steady income, but it was not until December 1953, that Dan and Lizzie Kramer realized a long-held dream. That year they bought a property, also along Holland Swamp Road, directly across from Ezra Troyers. This place was also a poultry farm and processing plant, however, no longer in operation.

The Kramers decided not to use the chicken house, but with a lot of hard work, the old butcher house would become their residence. They rolled out the huge old boilers, cleaned, put in partitions, fixed up the exterior, and painted. Finished, the Dan Kramer

family had a nice place of their own. Lizzie loved people and enjoyed sharing her hospitality. She often invited guests for Sunday dinner. Her green thumb showed itself with lovely houseplants and well-kept flower beds.

By the mid-1960s, as more of the Kempsville Mennonite Church families were leaving the area, Dan and Lizzie decided to move to Massey on Maryland's Eastern Shore. They sold their four-acre Holland Road property for \$14,000—a fair price then, but a pittance compared to the 1995 value of the same land today.

Clarence H. “Curly” Byler, owns an office complex a scant quarter-mile from Dans’ former property. He reported to Leroy Miller that “two or three years ago, eight acres here along Holland Road sold for two and three-fourths million dollars.”

Growing older, Dan and Lizzie concluded they needed to be closer to some of their married children. In 1972, they left Maryland and moved to Franklin, Kentucky, near their son Alvin’s family, and daughter Miriam, the Mark Stoltzfuses.

Lizzie was stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage June 6, 1974, while cooking supper and only lived fifteen more hours. Eighteen months later, Dan suffered what was believed to have been a heart attack January 25, 1976, and joined his wife and their two adult children, Mary and Johnny, in Glory.

Daughter Mary, twenty-seven, passed on after major cancer surgery in February 1958. She had married

Richard Short just thirty-four days earlier. Johnny drowned with Noah Hershberger nine years later on January 20, 1967, when their snowmobile broke through ice on an Ohio lake. Both Johnny and Mary were committed Christians and left radiant testimonies for Jesus.



Richard Short, husband of Mary Kramer. Courtesy of Sharon Troyer



Mary and Clara Kramer, circa 1955. Courtesy of Sharon Troyer

The Providence Mennonite Church: A Difference Over Language

by Leroy Miller

IF ANY ONE UNCOMMENDABLE TRAIT marks Mennonite and Amish Church history, it is our bent for division and church splits. On occasion, a clash between several strong personalities has been the source of the problem. However, more often than not, the issue has revolved around worldliness—the un-Biblical practices of the larger society. Romans 12:2 is frequently quoted as a reminder of this principle

of nonconformity: “And be not conformed to this world. . . .”

Much of the problem has been over deciding what constitutes worldliness. While outside observers may find the point of contention trivial—as it often has been—for the participants the matter amounts to compromising with an evil world versus letting go of a useless tradition. Twice in its ninety-five-year history, the Kempsville Amish-

Providence Mennonite Church at 5363 Old Providence Road, Virginia Beach, circa 1965. Photo by Francis Miller Jr.





Mennonite Church has struggled with this question until each opposing group went its own way.

In the first instance, the difference of opinions was over automobile ownership. The more conservative members considered a horse and buggy for local transportation as absolutely essential for remaining separated from the world. The liberal side, however, maintained

that increased auto traffic made horse-drawn vehicles unsafe and impractical on Princess Anne County's roads. They believed allowance could be made for church members to own cars and trucks, so long as the vehicles were painted solid black—a practice that was in effect until the mid-1970s. As a result of the disagreement, the Old Order horse-and-buggy group relocated

Newlyweds Lloyd and Joyce (Chandler) Hershberger, center, in June 1959. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Miller

at Stuarts Draft, Virginia, while the auto owners remained as the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church (see Viola Swartzentruber's and Elmer S. Yoder's accounts in chapters 5 and 11 for more details).

The second division occurred in 1952, when six families, including my parents, J. B. and Ida Miller, withdrew from the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church to form the Providence (Conservative) Mennonite Church. A seventh family, the Levi Bontragers, was also part of the group. The Bontragers had moved into the area several years earlier, but had not transferred their membership from the Conservative Mennonite Church at Hartville, Ohio, their former home.

Levi and Elva Bontrager were not necessarily responsible for the Providence breakaway; nevertheless, their presence gave impetus to a movement that had been growing for two or more years among several Kempsville Amish-Mennonite families. The group's sentiment was that English should be used in Sunday services when persons unable to understand German were present. While visitors of other persuasions were not turned away, German preaching and Sunday school effectively barred local persons outside the congregation from attending. (That accommodation was made in the late 1950s, and the switch to all English services occurred in 1961.)

At the time, 1952, however, there was no general consensus for quitting a centuries-old tradition, and the pro-

English group found scant support for the direction they wished to take. Several other Kempsville members were in partial agreement, but none were willing to join the dissidents in leaving the home church.

There were drawbacks to forming a new congregation, including the lack of an ordained minister and a place for Sunday services. Those obstacles, however, would not deter the seven families. With assurance from Conservative Mennonite Conference leaders that ministerial help would be forthcoming once they were organized, the group made plans for their first service. On a Sunday in May 1952, the following persons and their children met for Sunday school at the Frank Overholt home off Elbow Road in Virginia Beach: Levi and Elva Bontrager, Harvey and Mattie Miller, Joas B. and Ida Miller, John J. and Anna Miller, Leroy J. and Katie Miller, Frank and Marian Overholt, and Jerry and Thelma Yoder.

The new, as yet unnamed "Conservative" Church held services in members' homes the first months. However, by early summer a vacant store building was rented at Mear's Corner (the building later occupied by Heath's Auto Repair at Kempsville and Indian River Roads). A Sunday school with a longer than usual devotional and song period was held when no minister was present. Visiting ministers who preached for the fledgling congregation throughout the remainder of the year, 1952, included Alvin Mast of Greenwood, Delaware;

Harry Stutzman and Simon Coblentz from Ohio; and LeRoy Hooley and Eli Kramer from the Deep Creek Mennonite Church in Chesapeake. In November 1952, Nevin Bender, Andrew Jantzi, and David Beachy, Executive Committee of Conservative Mennonite Conference, held a baptismal service for Mrs. Loretta Land, a lady of early middle age, and four teenagers: Eli Ray Bontrager, Walter Miller, Jerry Overholt, and me, Leroy Miller.

The following year, the congregation marked several important events. A resident minister, Simon Coblentz and his wife, Savinna, arrived from Hartville, Ohio, early in 1953. The congregation gained name identity in moving to a newly constructed building at 5363 Old Providence Road, Virginia Beach—the present site of Providence (Conservative) Mennonite Church. The first service there was the wedding of Solomon “Solly” Beiler and Violetta Bontrager on May 7, 1953. Evangelist Andrew Jantzi from New

York state held a tent revival through most of May. The big tent, erected on the present site of Woodstock Elementary School, drew hundreds each evening from the area Mennonite Churches and the surrounding community.

Over the next decades, Providence Mennonite Church experienced growth as well as decline in numbers. In the late 1950s several families moved to Sarasota, Florida. In 1970, Simon and Savinna Coblentz moved back to Ohio. More families, including minister Joseph Hershberger’s, left in 1971, for new homes at Abbeville, South Carolina. Minister Solomon Beiler and his family moved to Pantego, North Carolina, that same year.

Today, 1995, Dale Keffer is senior pastor at Providence, and Ray Horst serves as assistant pastor. The congregation has just completed construction of a new sanctuary. Sunday morning church attendance averages forty-five to fifty.



Providence ladies sew clothing for needy persons, circa 1965. Left to right: Katie Miller, Ada Chupp, and Sarah Miller. Courtesy of Leroy Miller

Ministers Roster

Because the Kempsville Amish Church was without a resident minister until 1907, the tiny congregation depended on visiting ministers to hold preaching services. D. Z. Yoder and Joe Zook, from the Providence Amish Church in Oyster Point, Virginia, were two who came most frequently.

Minister	Minister's Wife	Years Served Old Order Amish at Kempsville
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Elias A. Yoder	Widower	1907-1921
Daniel S. Beachy	Amanda S. Miller	1911-1913
Daniel D. Yoder, Bishop	Mary Lee	1914-1921
Christian J. Swartzentruber	Susanna Beachy	1913-1933
Iddo Yoder, Bishop	Effie Yoder	1919-1924
William S. Yoder, Bishop	Amanda Beachy	1919-1941
Levi N. Bontrager	Mattie Hochstetler	1926-1933
Eli M. Yoder	Amelia Beachy	1933-1942
Simon D. Shrock, Bishop	Sadie Yoder	1935-1942

Beachy Amish- Mennonite

Simon L. Yoder	Lydia Yoder	1928-1953
Ezra E. Troyer	Amanda Kramer	1935-1969
Jacob J. Hershberger, Bishop	Matilda Yoder	1941-1965
Jonas J. Hershberger, Bishop	Katie Yoder	1942-1953
Jonas J. Swartzentruber, Deacon	Anna Miller	1946-1956
Joseph Mast, Deacon	Ida Christener	1954-1966
Christian Mast	Sarah Miller	1955-1970
Paul Brenneman, Bishop	Bertha Yoder	1955-1959
Raymond Kauffman	Malinda Yoder	1966-
Norman Swartzentruber	Mary Hershberger	1967-1970
Henry Raber	Martha Sommers	1971-1976
Titus Overholt	Ellen Hershberger	1975-1976
Lloyd Daniel Brenneman, Bishop	Naomi Hochstetler	1977-



Noah and Mary (Yoder) Miller, 1961. Noah served as assistant pastor at Providence from 1955 to 1958. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Miller



Simon and Savinna "Vinnie" Coblenz. Simon served as pastor and bishop at Providence from 1953 to 1970. Courtesy of Mrs. Katie Miller

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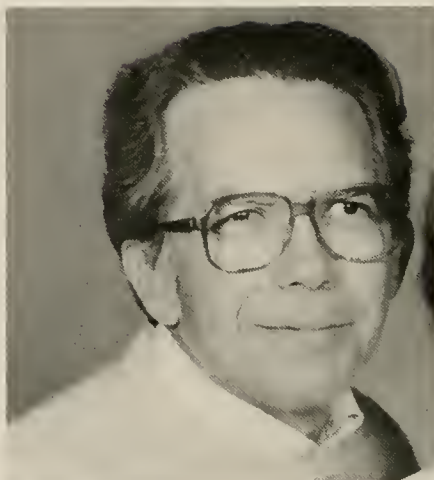


LEON R. ZOOK

LEON ZOOK IS A NATIVE OF THE Kishacoquillas Valley in Pennsylvania, the area where his great-great-grandmother, Roseanna (McGonegal) Yoder once lived. His ancestor, an Irish-Catholic orphan was raised in an Amish home. Her story is told in the longtime favorite, *Roseanna of the Amish*, by Joseph W. Yoder.

As a young boy, his family moved to Princess Anne County, living here six years, before returning to Belleville, Pennsylvania, in 1960. Ten years later, he returned to Virginia Beach and married Mary Overholt. They have seven children and are members of the Kempsville Amish-Mennonite Church.

He is the owner of Kempsville Cabinets in Virginia Beach.



LEROY MILLER

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Since the early 1960s, his feature stories and articles have appeared in various newspapers and magazines, including the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, *Virginia Beach Beacon*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Tampa Tribune*, *Christian Living*, *South Carolina*, and *The Upper Room* devotional guide.

Leroy and his wife, Sarah, live in rural Chesapeake, Virginia, and are members of Mount Pleasant Mennonite Church. They have four adult children and four grandchildren.

The
AMISH MEETINGHOUSE
— circa 1920 —



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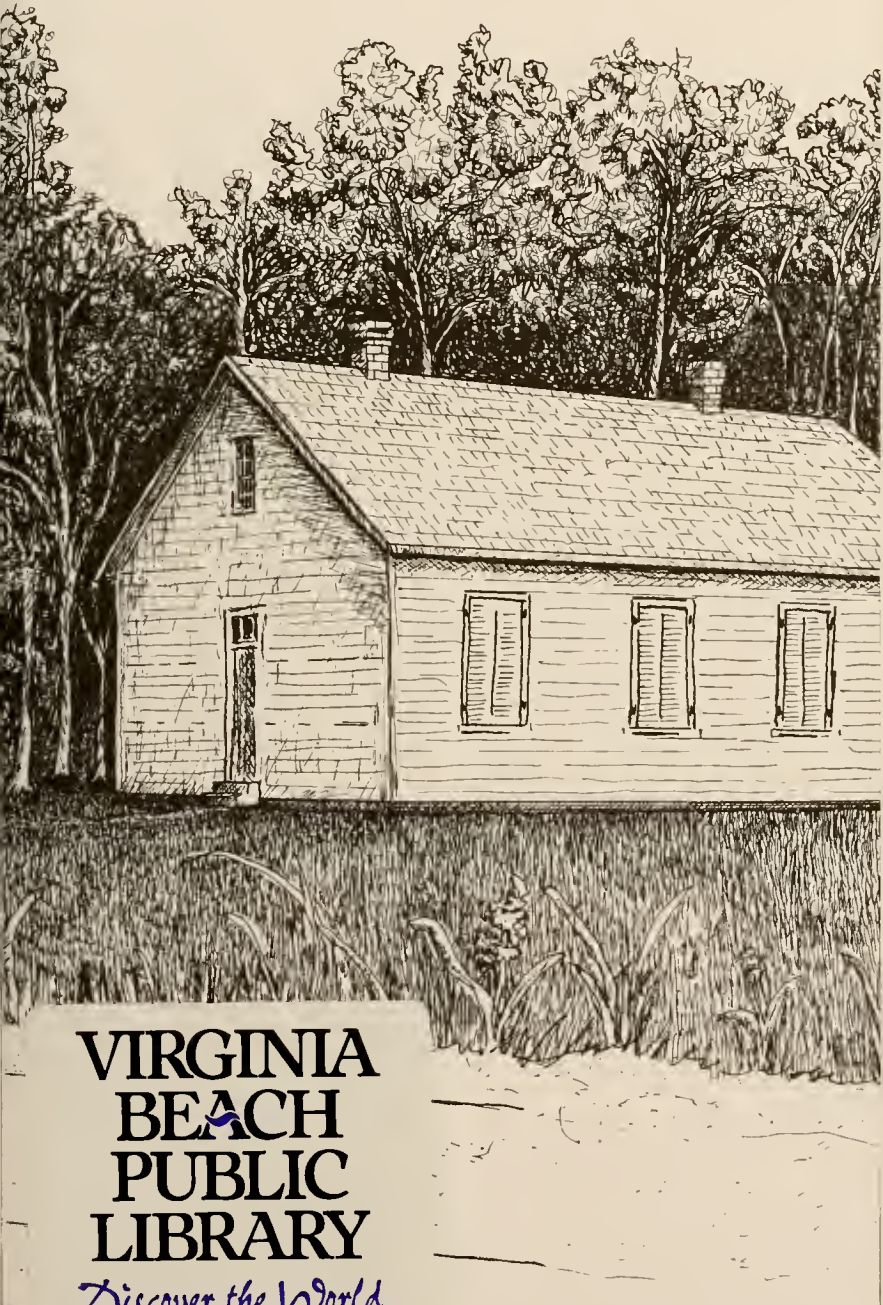
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